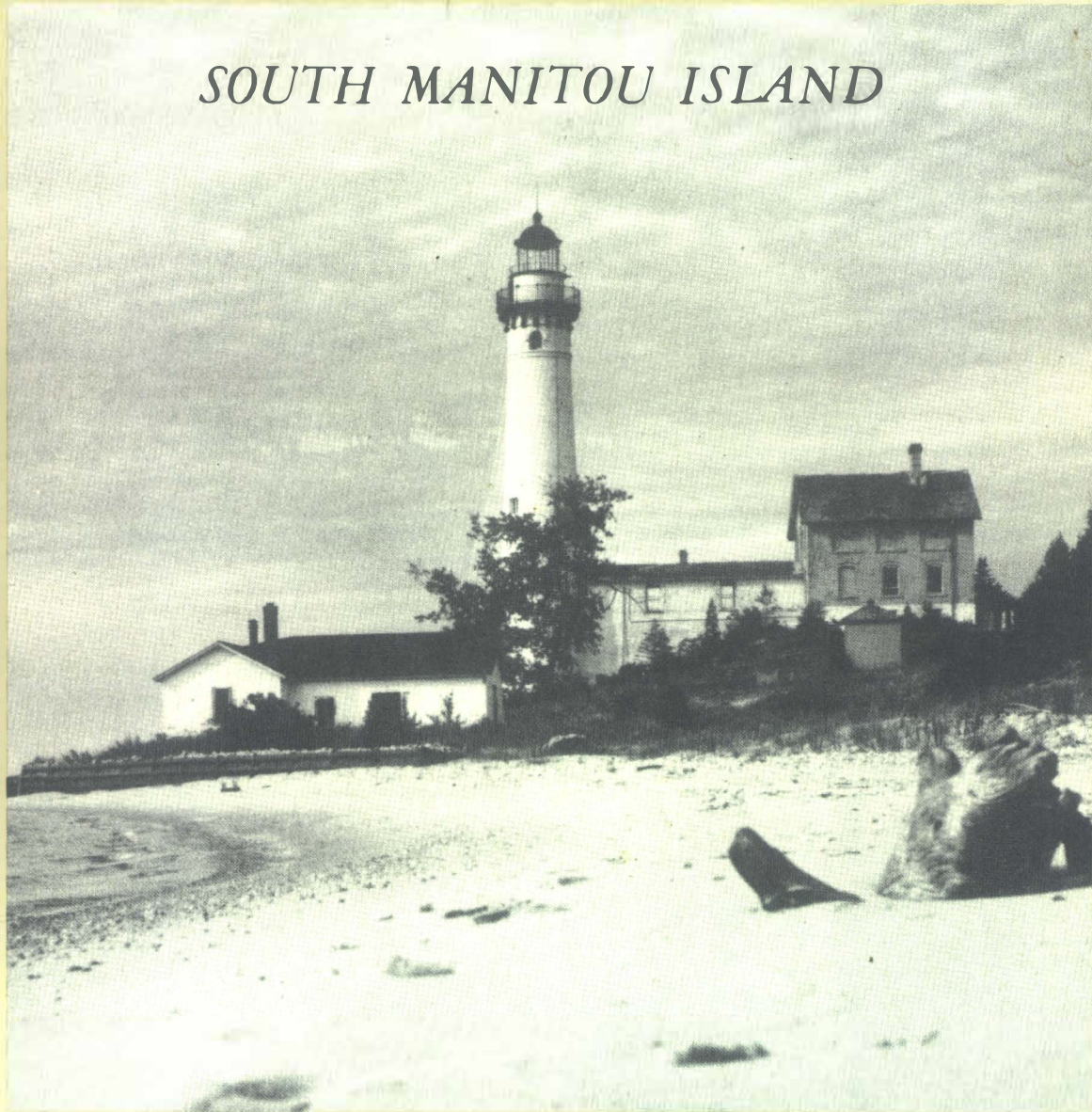


PIONEER TALES

and **OTHER STORIES** of

SOUTH MANITOU ISLAND



by William E. and Myron H. Vent

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South Manitou Island
Leelanau County, Michigan

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A hundred-year collection of island-life vignettes
encompassing the mid-1800's to the present century.

Cover photograph: South Manitou Island lighthouse and living quarters.
Erected in 1871, it is among the tallest on the Great Lakes.

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Introduction and Foreword

Manitou
ally

For centuries, South Manitou Island seemed to float majestically over the blue waters of Lake Michigan, the stillness unbroken by the sound of human voices. Only spirits lived there, according to the Indians, and over it brooded the Great Manitou who made all things. Seven miles from the mainland, separated sometimes by perilous seas and sometimes by ice floes, it was a bit far for the Indians in their light canoes. So it was, that the white men pushing west over the continent, discovered the island's safe harbor and remote beauty.

Suddenly, in the middle of the 1800's, it became host to a community of souls that called it "home." It was given a lighthouse to indicate its location to sailing ships and wood-burning steamers plowing through the Manitou Passage. Later, a life-saving station was set up to help ships in distress. For half a century the island had its own postoffice, with a sailboat that made regular crossings to the mainland, the nearest point being Glen Haven.

Among the early settlers on South Manitou was George Hutzler, our grandfather who emigrated from Bavaria with his family in the winter of 1853. For three months the little ship on which they sailed, wrested the waves of the North Atlantic, reaching New York harbor just a few days ahead of starvation. One child died and was buried at sea. Another child died of cholera in Buffalo where George found work on a wood-burning steamship sailing to Chicago and other ports on the Great Lakes. On one of the fueling stops at South Manitou, he thought the island would

be a good place to bring his family. And so, a few months later, the Hutzlers settled on South Manitou, taking out the first homestead on the island.

Working hard, with little to begin with, the Hutzlers gradually established a successful farm. Pigs, chickens, cows, horses, barns and sheds, orchards, fields of corn and oats--all that makes for a bountiful farm, came in time along with additional children. There were neighbors, too, the Hasses and Burdicks were closest. Scattered about the island were others such as the Becks, Armstrongs, Kitchens, Raimaus, and a second family of Hutzlers. By 1880, South Manitou had a population numbering close to a hundred. It had become a lively community with many stories to be told about its inhabitants and their activities. The story of the Hutzlers and their epic winter voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, along with the early history of the island has been told in Myron's book entitled, "South Manitou Island, From Pioneer Community to National Park".

Our mother, Louise Hutzler Vent, who was born on the island in 1868, recounted tales of their early existence, as did her sisters and brothers. The first six stories that follow are written as our mother told them to us; the remaining chapters are compiled from our own individual experience. As children, the promise of a story often persuaded us to take our daily nap. In later life we resolved to, someday, publish these vignettes of century-old history. We have tried to be as accurate as possible and all of the

stories are based on fact, but after eighty years, ageing memories may have clouded some of the details.

The Sleeping Bear Legend, now well known, is among our earliest recollections of the island. It is the story of a mother bear and her two cubs fleeing starvation by swimming eastward across Lake Michigan. According to the Indians, the mother bear made it to shore, waiting in vain for her exhausted cubs who had sunk beneath the waves, only a few miles from shore. The Great Spirit took pity on his creatures and caused two islands to rise out of the depths, one known as North and the other as South Manitou Island. The grieving mother became the giant Sleeping Bear Sand Dune.

To hear tales about the kind of life the island people lived was fascinating and some details of their existence were recorded. Many stories seemed to come to life when we visited island relatives during summer vacations. We were overcome by the mountains of golden sand and had a hard time convincing our playmates back home, that there was enough to fill a sandbox for every child in the city.

Many people can only dream of life on an island. As we grew to adulthood, we realized how fortunate we were to be able to live that dream, if only for short periods. Alone, after the mailboat departed, the outside world ceased to exist; it was like wandering backwards in time. We came, saturated with city noise, and were suddenly transported to a haven of quiet and solitude--no ringing phones, no blaring radios or TV. One gradually succumbed to the muted sounds of songbirds and the



*Myron H. Vent
on Lake Michigan carferry, 1938*

wind sighing in the trees, to the gentle rhythm of the waves rippling on the beach-- nature's own tranquilizer. We found ourselves irresistibly drawn back to this land of delight, year after year, with never a wish to break its magic spell.

In writing this book, we are indebted to our family and friends for their help and encouragement; to our mother for introducing us to a very special island world, and to our grandparents, whose courage and determination triumphed over such formidable odds. Most of all to Pioneer George Hutzler to whom is said: "We salute you grandfather, you were a real man."

Chapter I

Pete, our Favorite Horse

We never knew much about his ancestry, but that did not really matter to us as we watched this new four-footed member of our animal family, being led back and forth near the house, for all to see and admire.

Pete was not a big horse, about fifteen hands high, but stockily built and heavily muscled. His head was rather short and his small ears standing straight up, gave him an alert and spirited appearance. He was all-white with dark eyes, a flowing mane and a long tail. We loved this creature immediately and we children all had our turn petting him, especially about his full cheeks and soft pink nose. For his part, Pete took all of the attention in stride and was patient and gentle during the routine. When it was over, the tether was removed and Pete took off at a trot to renew his acquaintance with other animals in the pasture.

Father had made a journey from South Manitou, a small southern-most island about six miles off the western shore of Michigan, to Illinois by steamboat. He traveled there for two reasons: To see the new thriving city called, Chicago, that everyone seemed so enthusiastic about, and to examine some livestock from a widely known breeder of quality animals in Wayne, about thirty miles west of the city.

The steamboats plying up and down Lake Michigan often stopped at the

island dock to take on firewood, so it was a simple matter to board a ship bound for Chicago. Livestock, that he bought inland there, was driven to the Chicago dock and led aboard ship for the return trip to South Manitou. He had returned from this trip with Pete and some good breeding stock to improve our own herd of cattle. My brothers met the boat at the island dock to herd the animals over the well-worn wagon trail to our farm. My older brother, Louis, would ride horseback on our big brown stallion so that he could quickly round up any strays.

Neighboring farmers and friends would usually be at the dock to pickup incoming supplies or to renew contact with the outside world, or just to lend a helpful hand if needed. Free of chores for awhile, the children were anxious to come along and listen to the latest news and gossip. While waiting for the boat to arrive, some of us would coax a grownup to tell us a story. It was a delightful excursion under the blue sky, with towering, fluffy, white clouds constantly changing their shapes into all kinds of trees, animals and almost any form one could imagine. The story about a mythical flying horse fascinated me, and I sometimes searched the heavens, hoping to catch a glimpse of Pegasus.

In August, luscious wild blackberries ripening along the roadside were



West side bluffs

irresistible. The gentle summer breeze mingled the fragrance of pine, juniper and wildflowers. Surely, the great Manitou was prompted by a powerful love of nature when He created this tiny fragment of paradise.

My father was not at all impressed with Chicago and was disappointed to see so much swampland and mud. He laughed that one would carry a large portion of a farm around on one's shoes. He preferred the sandy loam of northern Michigan, similar to the land he tilled in his native Bavaria. The hard maple, white birch and pine forests, also were familiar sights, and the large stand of sugarbush provided delicious maple syrup and sugar for a real treat. Candy and such sweets were very limited in those days.

Pete became a familiar sight in the field, harnessed along side another horse pulling a plow or other implement. He seemed to enjoy the activity and always pulled his fair share of the load, as if to prove that he was just as strong as his larger partner. Pete would always come willingly when called, ready to be harnessed up for the day's chore. He seemed impatient to get going while

waiting for another horse to be rounded up.

Although Pete was gentle around us and very responsive to commands, he was ready to defend himself if one of the larger horses attempted to harm him. The big, brown stallion, at times, would try to bite or kick him, but Pete would fight back vigorously. He made up in quickness and agility what he lacked in size. It was a frightening sight to see the two horses rearing up on their hind legs, teeth bared, snorting and screaming in fury, attempting to bite and kick each other with their slashing hooves. My brothers would come running with poles and rakes and separate the fighters before they could do serious harm. Eventually, the horses came to accept each other and learned to live together peacefully.

We all became very fond of Pete and often rewarded his loyalty and affection with a carrot or an apple that he chomped with relish. One morning he poked his head in an open kitchen window, looking for a tidbit while we were having breakfast. We children were delighted at his antics, but mother took a broom and chased him away, all the while

scolding him for his behavior. After that he would wait patiently in the pasture for his reward.

My brother, Louis, was especially fond of Pete and the horse seemed to sense it. Louis was the first one allowed to ride him. Occasionally, he would pull a youngster up there with him for a slow trot around the pasture. Louis was very athletic and limber. He would run along side of Pete and leap up on his back while holding onto his mane; then Pete would really take off. I could sometimes hear Louis yelling: "Whee! I'm Jesse James," as they dashed across the pasture and disappeared into one of the tree-shrouded tunnels at the far side, pretending to escape phantom pursuers. Pete seemed to understand the game and entered into the fun by doing his best to save his young master from being captured by the posse. After the chase, Pete would canter back and be rewarded with an affectionate pat and a favorite tidbit. He thrived in this idyllic setting and became a part of our family life as my brothers grew to manhood.

Then, one by one, Louis and the others left the farm to marry and start their own family life on the mainland. Brother John remained on the island to look after mother and father and farming was reduced to a minimum. There was no longer a need for several horses and other livestock, so most were sold to farmers on the island. Pete was retained to pull us in our buggy to the dock and for other light chores.

Eventually, it was decided to take Pete across the lake to a small farm on the mainland near Empire, owned by my sister, Kate and her husband, Leonard. We did not want Pete with strangers. If he had been given to an



Massive sand dune

island neighbor he would have come back to us every time he was let loose to roam the pasture.

My sister's farm was on a gently rolling stretch of land that included small North Bar Lake. The western border was protected from Lake Michigan winds by a huge sand dune that ran the length of the farm. At the north end it tapered down to the lake level; only a low-lying sandbar separated the two lakes. Some of us went across the lake with Pete as he was being taken away, so that he would not become alarmed, jump out of the boat and try to swim back to the island. Leonard and Kate met us at the mainland dock with their horse and buggy. We returned with them to their farm with Pete trotting along, tethered to the buggy.

Everything had gone as planned and Pete seemed content in the new surroundings, munching on the grass in the pasture. We stopped by to stroke and pat Pete goodbye as we left for home, and he nickered softly as he recognized familiar family members. He watched us depart, his head raised and ears forward, but did not show signs that he knew he was being left behind.

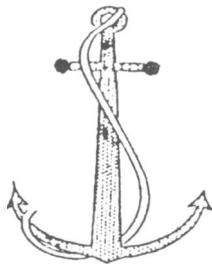
In a few weeks, however, Kate wrote that Pete was not eating as he should. Leonard would tempt him with oats he grew especially for his livestock, but they were barely touched. Pete still submitted to the harness and pulled his share of the load, but the energy and zest were gone. He also found a way to get out of the pasture and would follow the inland lakeshore to the sandbar, where he could see the island far out in the lake. When Leonard approached him with a rope to lead him back to the pasture, Pete would take a few steps into the water, and looking toward the island, give a longing sort of whinney.

Pete continued to lose weight and Leonard worked him less frequently,

hoping the horse would forget his island home and gain strength. He was also kept in a more secure corral where he could not wander off to the sandbar. Pete did not escape for a long time and Leonard decided he had forgotten the island, finally adjusting to his new home.

Then, one day when he went to the pasture to hitch him to the buggy, Pete was nowhere in sight. He had escaped again. Leonard immediately took off for the sandbar, but when he got near it he could not see Pete anywhere. Nevertheless, he kept on walking and when he came to a rise in the ground he saw Pete's body lying motionless on the beach. His head was pointing across the water toward the island and the ripples were gently lapping at his mane. His stout heart had given out and he had ran away for the last time.

I remember the story of an all-white flying horse that I thought I saw in my fantasy, galloping across the hills on the wild, west side of the island. But I'm sure that it was not Pegasus. It must have been Pete, back on his beloved island, once again escaping the phantom posse.



Chapter II

Blackie, the Orphan Calf

I knew that something was wrong, early that spring morning, as I tiptoed down the creaky bedroom stairs to the kitchen for breakfast. I could hear father and my brothers debating what to do about a newborn male calf whose mother had died shortly after he was born that very morning. They found the calf unsuccessfully trying to suckle, too weak to stand on his spindly legs. They had dried him off, put him in a clean stall and then came into our cozy kitchen for breakfast.

It was decided to put the calf in with another cow to see if she would act as a foster mother. They tried for several hours to get one of the other cows to feed him, but met with failure. Some of the cows would just walk away after sniffing the orphan. If he persisted in trying to suckle, others would kick at him with a hind leg. It seemed apparent that the foster plan would not work. The menfolk had other chores to do, so they put the calf back in a stall away from the other animals to prevent him from being trampled on.

I had watched everything from the kitchen window as I washed and dried the breakfast dishes. As soon as I was finished I ran over to the barn to see for myself how the orphan was doing. It was a pitiful sight. The starving calf was now so weak that

he could not rise to his feet by himself. I found a cloth hanging nearby and dried him off. Then I made a nest in the straw and partially covered him so that he would keep warm. As I patted him he made little bleating noises to show his distress, but there was no mother cow to feed and protect him. It was clear that the poor little fellow needed milk and tender care at once if he was to survive. I immediately made up my mind to try to save the orphan if only I could get permission to do so.

Being the youngest in the family, I had more time to spare than my older sisters and brothers. I decided to remind my father of this fact when I spoke to him. I was only eleven years old and had great respect and love for my parents. I especially admired my father for his many accomplishments. It seemed as though he could do just about anything.

When our noon meal was over and he was relaxing, I stood nervously by his side, not knowing just how to ask his permission to feed the calf. Father noticed my hesitation, and clasping his big calloused hand over mine, said: "Tell me, little Madchen, what are you worrying about?" It was an endearing name he used for me when he thought I needed special attention

or encouragement, so I blurted out my plan to take care of the orphan calf. He was surprised to hear my request and learn of my determination. Although he was skeptical about giving permission, I pleaded so earnestly, he finally said: "Yes, you can try."

I was overjoyed and ran at once to the milk shed to get a pan of milk and a narrow cup that I thought I could use to pour small portions of milk into the calf's mouth. My first effort ended in a real mess. More milk was spilled and splattered on my clothes and the barn floor than went into the calf. The poor thing even sucked on my fingers, but of course, got almost no milk that way. Some other feeding method had to be found or the calf would surely starve. There wasn't a nipple on the entire island and probably none on the nearby mainland.

As I tried to figure out what to do, I noticed an old canvas glove on a stool and thought of a plan that just might work. After washing the glove thoroughly I tied off the thumb and three of the fingers, leaving only the middle finger in place. Then I slipped the wrist over a bottle and cut a small hole in the top of the remaining finger. I was now ready to try it out on the calf. After filling the bottle and tying a cord around the glove so that it would not slip off, I held it up to the calf. He took the dripping substitute nipple in his mouth and slowly emptied the bottle. I could hardly wait to tell the good news to my father and the others. But the calf was wimpering for more milk. Twice again, I filled the bottle; he did not turn his head away until the last bottle of milk was almost empty. Then he went to sleep. When I looked in his stall later that day, he was

standing up rather shakily on his thin legs, ready for another two bottles of milk.

My father was very pleased to hear the good news and he and the rest of the family were generous with their praise. It seemed like a good time to announce that I had decided to name the Angus calf, Blackie. They agreed the name was a good choice--there wasn't a spot of another color on his jet-black coat.



Barn for small livestock

As I continued to feed Blackie, he would start bleating when I called him by name and he saw me coming with the milkbottle. I was skimming much of the cream off the top of the milk pail for Blackie and the rich diet helped him grow stronger day by day. He would follow me around the pasture and, sometimes, run after me if I coaxed him. We had some colts in the pasture and Blackie became almost as frisky as they were, sometimes running with them and kicking up his hind legs. They left him far behind, but it was amusing to watch him trying to keep up with

them. My brothers were sure that Blackie thought he was a colt, also.

Under my watchful care he continued to thrive and gain weight. I kept his shiny black coat clean and brushed and I thought he was the handsomest looking animal in the pasture. At times, I was tempted to ride him, but I was afraid he might buck and throw me off of his back. So I decided to try hanging onto his back while brushing him to see what would happen. He just stood there waiting for me to finish the brushing. I tried hanging on a few more times so that he would get used to my weight. Then one day in the pasture, I threw my leg over his back and sat quietly up there, hoping he would not throw me off. Blackie just kept munching on the grass, so I slapped his side a few times to encourage him to run. He would only take a few quick steps forward and then resume munching the grass. I don't know if he ever thought he was a colt, but he certainly did not act like a racehorse.

My father noticed how fond of Blackie I had become and he tried to discourage me from riding him and

running along side of him with the colts. But it was a lot of fun. My brothers would sometimes watch the chase and yell encouragement to me or the animals--it didn't matter--the colts always won. I did not realize at the time that my father was trying to to prepare me for the day when Blackie would have to be sold on the mainland along with the other cattle. I did not think about it often because it seemed so far off in the future.

But the time did finally arrive. Blackie had become a full-grown bull and was treated with utmost caution, not only by visitors to our farm, but by my father and other family members as well. This huge, black bull would just stand there and fiercely stare at an intruder, as if to dare him to come closer. My parents were becoming uneasy when they saw me walking briskly up to the bull with a handful of special grass for my unlikely pet. But he knew me and grunted contentedly whenever I scratched him behind his ears. To me, he was just a big, awkward softie, who slobbered all over my hand when I fed him a favorite morsel.

I stayed in the house on the day

Main barn and pasture, dunes in distance



the cattle were herded to the dock, where the boat was waiting to take them across the lake to the slaughterhouse on the mainland. I could not bear to watch Blackie leaving the farm for such a harsh fate, so I kept busy with my chores as the commotion outside gradually faded away. But my distress was not over.

About two hours later I heard someone outside excitedly calling my name. It was my brother John, with the news that Blackie would not go near the unfamiliar dock with the other animals. My father was afraid that if they were not careful, Blackie would run off into the woods and disappear. He had sent John back to the farmhouse to fetch me in the buggy that was hitched to our fastest horse. I was to loop one end of a stout rope around Blackie's horns and the boathands would try to winch him aboard the ship. I felt all hollow and sick inside, but there was nothing I could do except to ride silently with John back to the dock, as he urged the horse to run faster.

When I got there I saw my father and brothers, as well as some neighboring farmers and boathands, standing in protective positions, hoping to head off Blackie should he decide to charge at them. My father had a look of deep concern on his face as he handed me the rope and told me what to do.

Blackie was snorting and pawing the ground, his head lowered with those wicked looking horns ready to

impale anyone foolish enough to come after him. I took the rope, and as I approached him, calmly called his name. He stood perfectly still and watched me come closer and closer. The fire in his eyes gradually died as he recognized me--that soft-spoken little girl with the long dark hair. After all, wasn't I the one who had brought him back to health by feeding him that rich creamy milk he sucked with such pleasure? Hadn't I brushed his coat and ridden lightly on his back around the pasture? How could I let any harm come to him? Blackie grunted in recognition as I scratched him behind his ears for the last time, put the rope around his horns and led him on the dock and up the gangplank onto the boat among the cattle. The wide-eyed boatmen and neighbors could not believe what they had just seen. Father was very relieved and said that I should ride home in the buggy with John.

But the tears I had held back for so long now came in a deluge. I felt like a traitor. I had betrayed my Blackie. I did not want to see or talk to anyone and ran off into the woods to follow the solitary footpath that led back home.

Although it has been many years since I led Blackie aboard the boat, I now understand that it was necessary and why my father had chided us not to become too fond of a favorite animal. And yet, there is one part of the story I still wish I could change--the ending.

Chapter III

Schoolgirl Memories

I was the youngest of my seven brothers and sisters who survived to adulthood. Although I was christened Louisa, my parents and close relatives called me Mahdi. It means "Little Maid or Maiden" in the Frankonian dialect of my parents native Bavaria.

Kitty was my niece, but we grew up together as sisters--there was only a year or so difference in our ages. Her mother, my eldest sister Elizabeth, had died a few years after giving birth to another girl. It was decided that Anna, the younger daughter, should go to the mainland to live with her paternal grandparents; Kitty joined our family to live with us on our farm. She was a spirited, cheerful girl. I was delighted to have someone near my own age to help with the chores and to share with me all the wonders of growing up on the lovely, secluded island on which we were both born.

Every schoolday morning we walked together to the one-room schoolhouse, about a mile and a half from our farm. We set out across our grassy meadow with its sprinkling of wildflowers, and headed for the eastern tunnel-like opening into a virgin hardwood forest. There, we followed the winding wagontrail through the woods to a clearing, where we could see two of our

neighbor's cabin-size homes on hills that sloped down to the road. Continuing south, with any schoolmates who might join us at the crossroad leading to the old dock, we came to a partially wooded area of the road, bordered on both sides by a lush growth of tall ferns. Quite often a red fox looking for field mice would remain motionless, and as we came closer, bound off into the woods with his bushy tail flying straight out behind him.

A short distance more and we came to the gable-roofed schoolhouse with its small bell-tower. To one side was a well with a noisy pump one had to work vigorously for a dipper of cold water. An outhouse in back of the school was partially shielded by small pine trees.

All elementary grades were together in one large room. We frequently learned much by listening to the older students as they recited or wrote their assignments on the blackboard. We were supposed to concentrate on our own lessons, or practice writing on our slates, for we had no paper tablets. But our attention was often diverted by something more interesting. For me it was spelling.

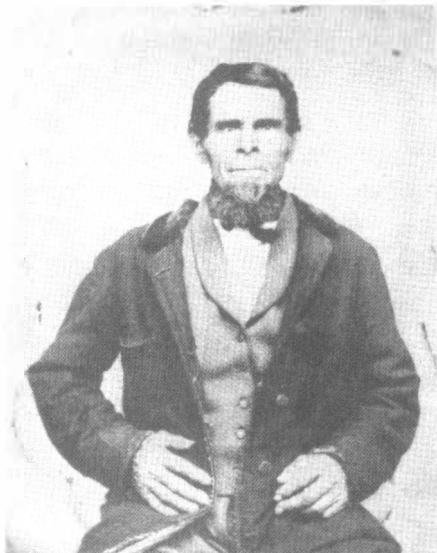
The schoolteacher, usually a young single man who taught all grades, was sent to the island by the

mainland officials. He would take turns living with each of the farm families who had school-age children, so that the burden of providing his room and board would be fairly apportioned.

During his stay with our family he encouraged us to read and study his books. A new world of adventure opened up for me, and I was sorry to see him leave at the end of the school year. Reading material was scarce. We were lucky if we had our own McGuffey's Reader. Only an occasional newspaper found its way to the island. Most of the news we got was by word of mouth. My parents had a German-language bible that we read each Sunday, but I enjoyed reading the teacher's King James version in English. He admonished me to note how words were spelled and to pay attention to their usage and meaning.

I proved to be an apt pupil and always looked forward to the spelling bees we had at school. I did fairly well, but frequently lost out to the older students. There was one

Authors' grandfather, George Hutzler, at about fifty years of age, from an old daguerreotype



Authors' grandmother, Margareta Hutzler, at age eighty-seven, from a 1907 photograph

boy especially, who was a very good speller whom I was anxious to outspell. My opportunity came suddenly one day when just the two of us were left standing. The final word was Aaron, and he misspelled it. The name had caught my eye in the bible, so while the rest of the class waited expectantly, I proudly spelled it: "Aaron, big A little a-r-o-n." I had won my first spelling bee. Kitty ran ahead of me as we returned home from school and excitedly announced the news to our family who made quite a fuss over my achievement.

The next day being Saturday, Kitty and I got permission to visit our neighbor, Ella, to tell her about the spelling bee. We knew that Ella usually baked bread and some delicious sugar cookies every Saturday, which was itself a good reason for our visit.

Ella and her husband, Sigmund, lived alone on a small farm northwest of us. They had a difficult time trying to make a living on mostly poor sandy soil. My parents had helped them now and then with

flour and other staples.

To get to Ella's house Kitty and I would take the trail that ran through the forest of maple trees at the western edge of our pasture. The trees vying for sunlight grew straight up with few limbs. They provided a cathedral-like canopy overhead. The sunlight sparkled through the leaves as the breeze stirred the branches. It was delightfully cool even on a hot midsummer day.

We loved to listen to the many birds whose songs echoed around us as we walked along, with the dry leaves and twigs crackling underfoot. My favorite songbird was the Wood

William and Myron Vent, with Uncle John and mother, Louise, on steps of island schoolhouse, 1920



Thrush, with the clear flute-like song that seemed to reassure us as we got deeper into the forest.

The path was kept clear mainly by the tramping of cattle and other animals on their way to the lake for water. We were often startled by a sudden movement in the brush, but usually, it was a chipmunk or a squirrel that scampered off if we came close to its hideout.

Sometimes, Kitty would try to frighten me, pretending she saw the counterfeiter, who was supposed to have buried a cache of bills near a large stump somewhere in the forest. She was sure we would be kidnapped if we chanced upon him digging up his illegal riches. This idea was a signal for us to run away from the spot as fast as we could.

But when we approached the area where the eagles nested, we became very quiet so they would not be disturbed. My brother, John, and his friend, Willie, came by the tree one day and decided to look into the nest, hoping to see if there were any eggs or eaglets in it. Willie was thin and wiry, with long legs he could almost wrap around the tree, so he started to shinny up the trunk. He did not get more than halfway to the nest when the parent eagles returned. They looked much larger and more ferocious up close than from a distance, so he slid to the ground in a hurry and ripped his trousers on the way down. Every time the boys retold the story, the eagles became larger and larger until Kitty and I decided they might even try to fly off with one of us.

We had seen how a red-tailed hawk could suddenly dive to the ground and grasp a squawking chicken in its talons. It was a frightening sight to watch sudden death from out of a



From bright sun to deep shade in maple forest

clear blue sky, strike at our flock of pigeons struggling to escape in a hail of feathers. So we would tread quietly past the tree with the eagles nest and tried to think of sugar cookies.

As we came to the clearing where Ella's cabin was built, we could often see the pale blue smoke rising from the chimney, a sure sign that she was baking. Or she might be seen hoeing in her vegetable garden, with her grey shawl over her shoulders that she wore even on a hot day.

The little valley where Ella and Sig lived was a pleasant place, with many wild roses lending color to the landscape. They were single pink blossoms with an occasional white or red flower. In a sheltered spot here and there, might be a bush as tall as I was, with dozens of blooms. The roses seemed to grow better on the northwest corner of the island than anywhere else.

It was always a friendly visit unless Sig was home. Sometimes, we peeked out of the woods before approaching the cabin, hoping to see him working in the field. He did not like children

and was short-tempered with us.

Ella was just the opposite. She had no family of her own and was always happy to have someone to talk to. We were too polite to ask for a cookie, but she could tell by the way we stole glances at the cookie jar what was on our mind. After that long walk her delicious cookies stilled our hunger as we exchanged the latest news.

If we heard Sig calling her or saw him coming we would leave. We couldn't bear to hear him scold and talk roughly to Ella. One neighbor said he saw Sig shove and push her in a fit of temper. We once saw a red bruise on Ella's arm and asked her how it happened. She just said she bumped it accidentally and then turned her face away from us. When we told my parents about our fears of Sig's cruelty we were cautioned not to repeat such gossip.

Our later visits became less frequent as we noticed Ella looking gaunt and thin. She appeared nervous and was no longer very talkative, glancing out of the window from time to time to see if Sig was

coming. We wished that there was something we could have done for her, but she always refused our help and denied that she was ill.

Our worries were confirmed one day when we neared the cabin and saw Ella lying unconscious on the ground near her garden. Her face was deathly white and she did not answer when we asked what was wrong. The shock of our discovery overcame our fear of Sig, and we ran across the field shouting at him to come quickly and help Ella. Then we headed for home and breathlessly told my parents what we had seen. Father immediately left to see if there was anything he could do for them, but it was too late.

Sig was overwhelmed by his loss. Then his health declined and his

mind deteriorated rapidly. He insisted that he was lured from the mist-shrouded meadow, by what seemed to be Ella's ghost, but when he drew near, the apparition mysteriously vanished among the hundreds of blossoms on her favorite wild-rose bushes. They had grown almost as tall as, and thrived next to the shed, in which she kept her garden tools. Sig frequently could be seen walking in the garden wearing her old gray shawl, calling her name and begging her to come back to him. But his remorse and pleading came too late--Ella was beyond hearing.

I once overheard some of the islanders talking about the law of retribution. At the time I did not fully comprehend what it was. Now, I understand.

Chapter IV

The Shipwreck

One stormy summer morning, as I scampered along the beach in my barefeet, dodging the waves endlessly washing ashore, it appeared that our broad, crescent-shaped harbor had been transformed into a watery forest of masts. When I stopped to rest, I counted about sixty ships safely sheltered in our island refuge.

It was a common sight to see the vessels with their sails lowered, riding out violent seas and severe storms. The graceful ships, securely at anchor and gently tugging at their hawsers, presented a tranquil picture. It was hard to realize that only a short distance away the lake was lashing

out at any ship unfortunate enough to stray outside the protective arms of the harbor. Seagoing mariners, accustomed to rough ocean crossings, were amazed at the fury of a lake storm and admitted that it demanded every ounce of seamanship they could muster to avoid disaster.

At times, Lake Michigan can be an unforgiving adversary. The coastlines, strewn with rocks and the shoals around the Manitous, are littered with many wrecks, grim reminders of losing battles with a rampaging lake. Even the harbor that shelters the large ships, can be treacherous for small boats.

One of our neighbors, out with his young son in his light sailboat, was capsized by a sudden gust of wind. He was less than fifty yards from shore in water about as many feet deep. Although he managed to get his child back into the boat, he was exhausted by the struggle and drowned. His horror-stricken wife witnessed the tragedy from shore. She could not swim and there was no other boat in sight that might have come to the rescue. Her husband's body was later recovered.

There were other accidents: A person falling overboard could not survive long in that cold water. Even in midsummer the water's temperature does not rise to a comfortable level in the harbor that is around two hundred feet deep in some places. Most of the ships that were driven onto the rocks or were grounded on shoals around the island, were eventually broken up by the action of the waves. Their cargos, washed ashore, were salvaged by the islanders. As a teenage girl I witnessed several close calls, and sometimes, experienced a rough crossing in the sailboat that made the trip across the open lake to the mainland.

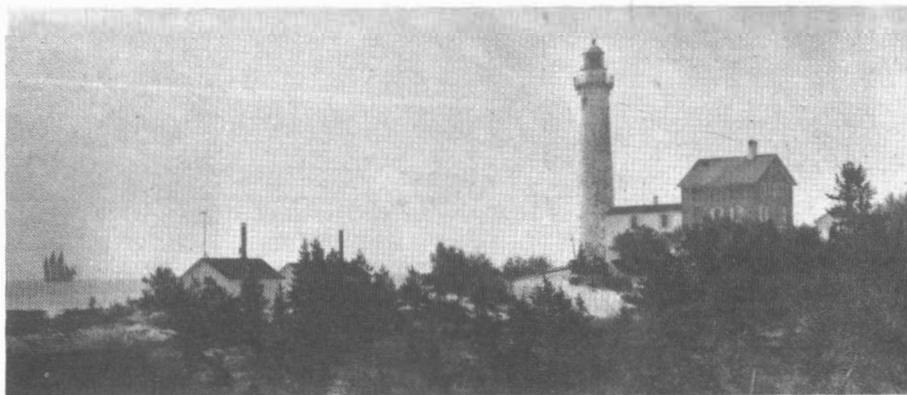
I remember, one year, the weather had been unusually stormy. Some of

our crops had been damaged by high winds. There were reports of several ships being driven ashore on mainland shoals, and some unlucky vessels ended up on the bottom of the lake. One violent storm drove a schooner, loaded with grain and other items, onto the rocks that are widespread along the south shore of the island.

The ship had been heading north for the Manitou Passage. This is the charted route--usually taken between the islands and mainland--when it was overtaken by a storm sweeping out of the southwest. The crew later told us what happened: The sky had darkened ominously and the wind velocity steadily increased until the captain gave the order to reef the sails. Before the men could carry out his order, the full fury of the storm hit the vessel, splintering the foremast and shredding the sails into ribbons. The rain came down in torrents and the massive seas drove the ship off course directly toward the island. Visibility was reduced to less than a hundred yards and the pilot could no longer control the ship's course--the rudder was useless.

Hoping to slow the rush to disaster, the captain ordered his men to drop the anchors. Some of the deepest spots in Lake Michigan are southwest

South Manitou Lighthouse, from National Archives photo, circa 1880



of the island and the anchors did not immediately take hold. Eventually, one of them did hit bottom and slowed the ship somewhat, but the vessel, overloaded with grain and farm machinery, was riding low in the water. It was now in danger of being swamped. Some of the crew became panicstricken and feared they would all go to the bottom. Meanwhile, the wind shifted around out of the northwest and the ship, now in the lee of the island, lost momentum as it ground to a halt onto the rocks less than a hundred yards from shore.

The captain and his men, relieved to have been spared from what they thought was certain disaster, were now faced with new problems. They first looked for rising water in the ship's bilge. The stout oak timbers seemed to have withstood the pounding and appeared to be in good shape. Water that had seeped in was pumped out. A skiff was then lowered over the side so that the crewmen could probe around the hull with long poles to determine how the ship was locked in place. They discovered that it was resting amid some large, rounded boulders holding it securely. The captain reasoned that if they could raise the ship a few inches it might slide out stern first into deeper water. The ship was worth ten times the value of the cargo, so he decided to jettison the grain--mostly wheat and corn.

My brother, Louis, had been on the beach with neighbors watching the unfolding drama. When he heard that tons of grain were about to be dumped overboard, he mounted his horse and galloped home calling for my father. The grain harvest that year had not been too plentiful. Father, who was anxious to maintain

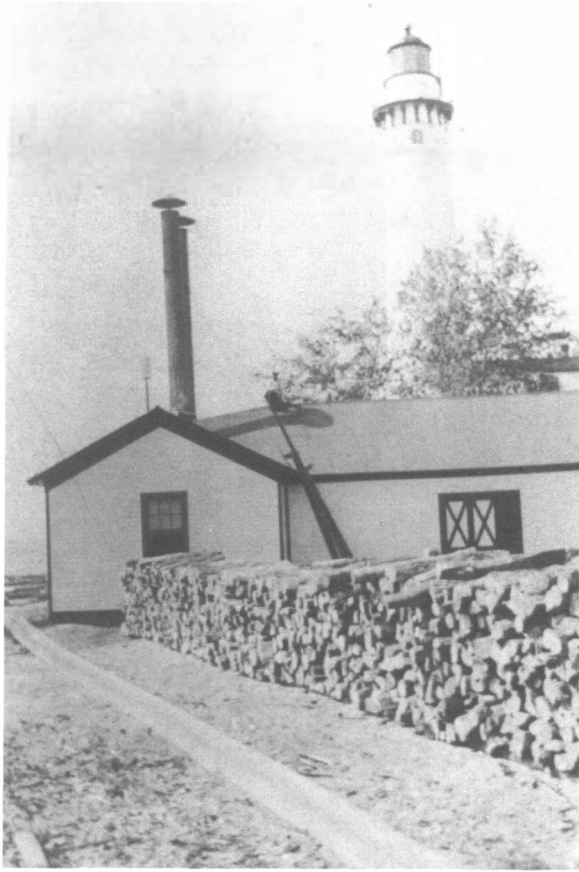


*Authors' Uncle Louis, circa
1887 photo*

his good breeding stock, worried that he might have to butcher or sell some of the herd if he could not stretch the cattle feed through the winter months.

We had a sixteen-foot flat-bottom rowboat in the barn that my brothers helped to load onto a sturdy, flat-bed wagon, equipped with wide wheels to cope with loose sand, and headed for the section of beach nearest the ship. The plan was to row out to the ship and grab the bagged grain as it was being thrown overboard. They were successful and loaded the rowboat until the water was almost up to the gunwales. Rowing to shore, they quickly unloaded the grain onto the beach and went back to the ship for another load. Other neighbors also took part in the salvage operation. Again and again they rowed back and forth until all of the grain was unloaded.

Suspence mounted as the time arrived to see if the plan to refloat the ship would meet with success. Capstan bars were placed in position



Cordwood for foghorn boilers, stacked next to boardwalk, circa 1900

and the captain ordered his men to slowly turn the capstan. He wondered if the anchor would hold as he watched the thick hawser grow taut. Then suddenly, as the men applied more force to the capstan, there was a creaking noise from the ship's timbers. In a few minutes the vessel slid stern first off the rocks and floated free.

By this time a crowd had gathered on the beach to watch the struggle. When it was clear that the ship was once more afloat, they sent up cheers for the captain and his plucky crew. The boat, with all of the sailors aboard, was able to limp into port. After refitting and making minor repairs to the hull, the courageous

crew, together once more on their reconditioned ship, resumed their livelihood on the lake.

The grain that my father and brothers salvaged, helped to feed our cattle and other livestock during the winter months. Some was even left over for our flock of chickens.

Note: The sequel to this story is one told by mainlanders who claim that South Manitou for a time was inhabited by pirates. The activities of the pirates took place mostly during nighttime when they moved lights on the island that would cause ships to sail off course and end up on South Manitou's shoals. The pirates could then salvage the ship's cargo at their leisure.

Chapter V

Sven and the Violin

I had just finished my chores in the kitchen, when our dog, Curley growled and started sniffing at the entrance. He was a retriever with a thick brown coat of fur that turned into a mass of tight curls when the moisture in the air increased before a thunderstorm. Curley knew all of our neighbors and wagged his tail in a friendly greeting whenever anyone approached the farmhouse, so I was puzzled by his show of hostility.

Before I could investigate, there was a loud knock on the front door. I held onto Curley's collar and tried to calm him as I opened the door. There stood a handsome, blond young man with an engaging smile, holding protectively onto a battered violin case. He asked to speak to my father and added that he was looking for work. His name was Sven.

My parents were a short distance away looking over some sweet cherry trees just east of the farmhouse. They heard the commotion and walked around to the front to see what was causing the disturbance. Sven introduced himself again and said that he reasoned he had a good chance of finding work here, because he heard it was the largest farm on the island.

Sven, it seemed, had left his home in Sweden and signed up as a deckhand on a schooner bound for America. Storms and poor navigation

had driven the ship off course and they ended up near the west coast of Africa. They anchored and rowed ashore a few times to replenish their supply of drinking water and whatever food they could buy or otherwise secure.

My mother took pity on this adventurous young man and cut short his account by asking him into our kitchen for a lunch of homemade bread, ham and milk. He was half-starved. As he ate, he told us that the crew, sometimes faced with near starvation, were not too conscientious when they scrounged around on shore for food. On one occasion, two of the men came back with a squealing pig. It was quickly butchered and roasted on a rough spit rigged up on the beach.

The smoke and noise of the party attracted the attention of the local natives. They armed themselves with spears and clubs and were apparently determined to punish the intruders who had run off with their pig. One of the crew fired some shots into the air to distract them. It delayed the natives long enough for the men to shove their boats into the water and row back to the safety of the ship.

Eventually, they picked up the easterly trade winds that carried them to America. They sailed north along our eastern coast until

reaching New York harbor, where Sven left the ship, looking for a brighter future. He worked his way westward, and when a lake boat he was working on anchored in South Manitou harbor, he decided to try farm work. When he knocked on our door, he had only the clothes on his back, fifteen cents in his pocket and his precious violin that, miraculously, had survived the months of travel intact. Sven was just nineteen years old and an orphan.

My parents decided that Sven should stay with us for awhile. He could help my brothers with their chores, preparing the ground for spring planting and enlarging the orchard--my father's proud achievement. We had plenty of food. The two deep sand pits near the edge of our maple forest were still half full of potatoes and several different vegetables. There were enough sausages and hams in our smokehouse. Other stored foodstuffs were more than adequate to feed this hungry, young adventurer, who was by now quite willing to join us.

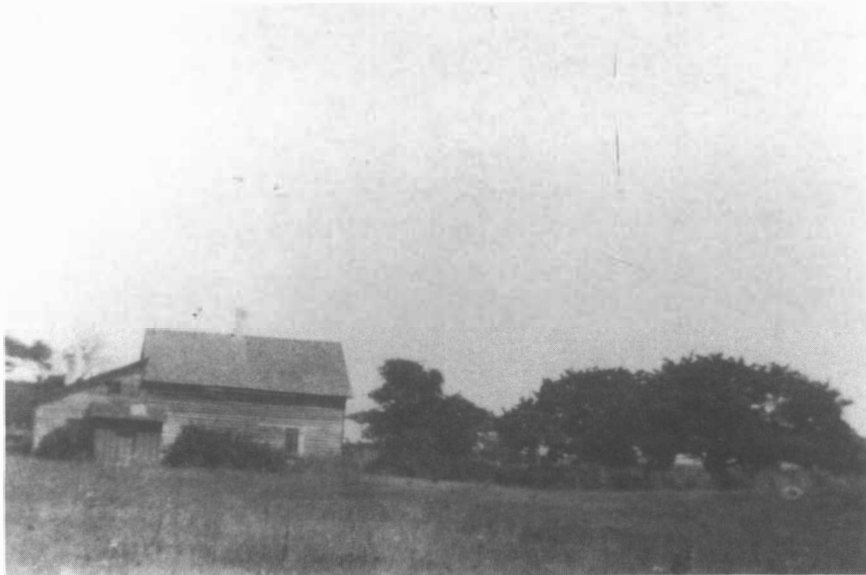
There was an extra bed in my brother's room, and they both were

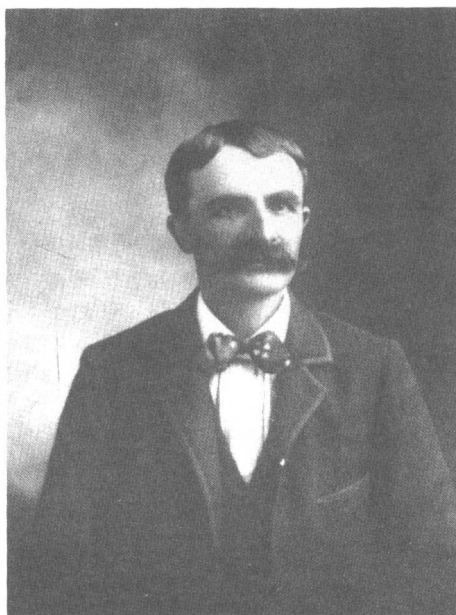
happy to have Sven's companionship. He was accepted as a family member and willingly shouldered his share of the work. We never tired of hearing about his adventures at sea. The German and Swedish language similarities, plus English words he quickly acquired, lessened any language problems. An occasional misunderstanding always ended in laughter.

Sven had studied the violin in Sweden and could play fairly well in spite of the rough work he did aboard ship and on the farm. My brother, John, was fascinated with the instrument and Sven agreed to teach him to play. He proved to be an apt pupil.

Our parents loved music and surprised us with an upright piano they bought from a settler on the mainland. It was transported across the lake on a fishing boat when the weather was calm and hauled by horse and wagon over the sandy road to our house. Before long, John was playing familiar tunes, and I played harmonizing chords on our piano along with him. Everything was played by ear and music became a

Old homestead, rose garden and sweet cherry trees, circa 1900





*Authors' Uncle John,
photo about 1895*

source of much pleasure for our family and friends.

An occasional barn dance added merriment to our lives. Along with our neighbors, we would decide which barn to use and what to bring for refreshment. Sandwiches made with fresh-baked bread, cookies and apple cider were favorites. Off-duty Coastguardsmen stationed on the island were often invited. In their natty uniforms they added color and excitement to the gathering. Our parents took part in the fun and saw to it that order was maintained. But our neighbor, Willie, who was an expert at making hard cider, would hide his jug in a nearby corner or other secret place. Now and then, one of the older men would drift outside for a sample.

The dancing usually started out with a familiar schottische. I can remember the caller with his singing and humorous patter as he urged the dancers to: *Bow, curtsy and Swing your opposite across the hall, Now swing your own and promenade*

all. Do-sa-do and all join hands . . . John and Sven played the fiddle--as it was called--for the dances and took turns grinding out well-known tunes. The melodies were simple, usually repeated before sliding into a second key for variety, all with a pronounced beat. The younger people preferred polkas which were lively and spirited. They were often accompanied with handclapping and foot stomping by those who could no longer stand the rigors of the dance floor. We were like one big family. Everyone shared in the joys and sorrows of the day.

That year seemed to have passed quickly. Late in the fall Sven announced that he intended to move to the mainland. He was promised a job in a lumber camp where he would be doing the kind of work he liked. He had thrived on our good food and stable home environment and had developed into a strong and muscular young man. He was a fine example of his Viking forebears. With winter approaching there was very little farm work for him. We could tell

that he was getting restless.

In addition to our big draft horses, we had a few quarter horses that my brothers rode when they rounded up the cattle, explored the island or went visting. My older brother, Louis, was a wiry athlete and a very good horseman. He taught Sven to ride and they often rode together, sometimes racing each other across the meadow until they disappeared into the forest. On one such ride Sven confided to Louis that he wanted to build up a nestegg, so that someday he could buy a farm, marry and have a family of his own.

We had all become very fond of Sven and were unhappy that he wanted to leave. Also, logging in a virgin forest was very dangerous work. My father was an expert with an axe and had worked in the forest to earn money to bring his family from Buffalo to the island.

Only an axe was used to fell the immense trees that had defied countless storms over the years. The crosscut saw had not yet been introduced. Father told of his own experiences in the forest and spoke of the ever present danger of being maimed or killed by one of the falling giants. It was not always possible to calculate exactly where a tree would fall. A sudden breeze could give the tree a push before the axeman was ready and he would have to scamper for safety as the tree picked up momentum, landing with an earth-

shaking roar.

Winter was the favorite season for logging because it was easier to haul logs on a sled over hard-packed snow and ice. The deep snow helped to level the unevenness in the road. It was also less likely that a sled loaded with tons of logs, would topple over, as would a top-heavy wagon. In hilly country the road had to be carefully planned so that steep grades were avoided. If a load of heavy logs gained too much speed, the horses could not stop it and the logs, horses and driver could meet with a disasterous accident at a curve in the road.

Nevertheless, Sven was determined to try his hand at logging in spite of the dangers. He needed a good axe, so he was given the familiar, double-bitted axe he had been using in our own hardwood forest. Father had formed a tough hickory handle, called a helve, with the proper curve and length for his height and build.

It was late autumn when we all rode down to the dock with Sven to bid him goodbye and wish him well. He decided to leave his violin in the care of my brother, John. It surely would have been damaged in a primitive lumber camp. We never saw or heard of Sven again. The country west of the Mississippi river was being settled. We believe the thought of having his own homestead and his natural wanderlust lured him to again strike out on his own.

Chapter VI

Dash Across the Ice

Winter was approaching—one could tell by the crisp morning air. The cold northerly winds that nipped at one's nose and ears warned of what was on the way. It added a sense of urgency to our preparations for survival, before being caught up in winter's frigid grasp.

It had been a good growing year. A bountiful harvest of potatoes, carrots, turnips and squash, were in the two deep sandpits near the edge of our maple forest. They were covered over with boards and straw to keep the contents from freezing. A large yield of parsnips, sweetened by a frost or two, were to be dug up shortly and added to this essential stockpile.

An adequate supply of sausages and hams were hanging in our smokehouse. Its blackened walls reeked of the hickory and maple smoke used in the curing process. There were large sacks of flour and sugar in our pantry and the cupboard contained dried beans, peas and fruit. Other preserved foods in glass jars were stored in the fruit cellar. Our cows provided us with all of the milk and cream we could use—some of which was churned into butter and cheese.

My brothers would occasionally trap a horseshoe hare. The summer coat of brown fur changed to white during winter, and their broad hind feet

matted with coarse hairs, enabled them to bound across the deep snowdrifts. Hasenpfeffer, made with the rabbit meat, or a treat of baked or stewed chicken, now and then, added variety to our diet.

Other foodstuffs were in their proper places, and cord after cord of wood was piled up near the kitchen door, so that we had fuel handy for the big cookstove and the parlor range. Both had to be kept going day and night to keep us from freezing during severe weather. One could be uncomfortably warm near the stove and quite cold in another part of the house.

There was no heater in the upstairs bedrooms, but my mother's handmade featherbeds and blankets kept us warm and comfortable. Sometimes, I would bring up a flat stone warmed on the stove, wrapped in flannel, and place it under the blankets at the foot of the bed. It was pure heaven to sink into the featherbed with my cold feet warming up on the stone. I almost always dropped off to sleep immediately.

The clean fresh air and plenty of exercise aided in keeping all of us healthy most of the time. Occasionally, someone from the mainland with a cold would visit the island. Then, the sniffles seemed to



Authors' mother, Louise, from photo circa 1889.

travel around among the islanders until it ran its course.

I had caught one such cold that left me with a very sore throat. The usual hot onion poultice that we used as a remedy only brought me temporary relief. Both tonsils were so inflamed I had trouble swallowing food. My parents and relatives agreed that I should see a doctor before my throat got any worse. That meant a mid-winter trip to the mainland, for we had no doctor on the island.

Heavy snow had already blanketed the island hills and meadows. Some winters, the snowfall totaled over one hundred-fifty inches. It was occasionally accompanied by strong winds or a blizzard, that drove the snow in huge drifts up to the eaves of our farmhouse. When the front door was opened, we were faced with a wall of snow that had to be shoveled away, before my father and brothers could make a path to the barn to feed the livestock. Paths also had to be shoveled to the well and

outbuildings, and the trail to the forest and root-cellars kept open.

With the lake now frozen solid, we decided that my brother, John, would take me the eight miles across the ice in our horse-drawn sleigh. Some of our neighbors had already made the trip to Glen Haven for supplies; it seemed a good time to get started. We planned to stay with my sister, Kate, and her husband, Leonard, at their farm on the mainland; they would take me to see the doctor in a nearby town. John would then return with me to the island.

We headed toward the south end of the huge Sleeping Bear Sand Dune, where the bluffs taper down to a low sandbar separating Lake Michigan and North Bar Lake on my sister's farm. The weather was sunny and favorable. We were bundled up with blankets and arrived without incident. Kate prepared a warm meal for us, and that night I had a good rest in one of her featherbeds.

Having never been to a doctor, I

was rather apprehensive the next morning as Leonard drove me to town. The doctor turned out to be a personable young man who had commenced practicing only a few months earlier. He examined my throat and said: "Yes, your tonsils are diseased and should come out." He had never removed tonsils and did not have the necessary surgical instrument, but he was familiar with the operating procedure. We agreed that if I paid for the instrument he would remove the tonsils. I paid the twenty-five dollars he said it would cost and returned to my sisters.

Kate and Leonard insisted I stay with them until the doctor was ready to operate on my throat. John drove back to the island to report to our parents. He promised to return for me in about three weeks. Eighteen days later when Leonard went to the post office for mail, he learned that the instrument had arrived. The doctor said to bring me to his office the next morning for the operation.

I had once seen a bad tooth being pulled from the jaw of a moaning neighbor, but I had no idea of the ordeal in store for me. I was given no anesthetic, but was told to squeeze the padding on the reclining armchair I was sitting on whenever I felt any pain. I gagged frightfully as the doctor prepared one tonsil for removal, but when he inserted the instrument and snipped it off I thought my throat had been severed. The pain was almost more than I could bear. The doctor instructed me to return to the office the next day to have the remaining tonsil removed. I was in a daze as Leonard took me home. I'll never know where I got the courage to go back and face that torture again, but I did and I survived. It was a miracle that I did

not bleed to death.

My brother returned for me a few days later. He came in our large two-horse sleigh, having brought some neighbors along who planned to remain in town. Kate wanted John to stay overnight and leave with me for the island the next day, but he was worried about the threatening weather and wanted to leave at once. My throat was still very sore, but I was anxious to get home where I could rest and regain strength with my mother's help.

John had selected a pair of our draft horses for this trip. They had been trained to work together as a team, had thick shaggy coats and were better able to withstand the cold. We said goodbye to my sister and Leonard, and plodded through the snow to the shelter where the horses were tethered. They seemed nervous and restless, as if anxious to return home to the comfort and safety of their stalls.

The island was in plain view when we started out. John planned to follow the tracks left by the sleigh earlier in the day. If worsening weather obscured our vision of the distant island, following the tracks would be the only way to keep from getting lost in that dazzling white expanse with no landmarks to guide us. The horses seemed to know they were headed homeward and bounded forward, picking up speed as John found the tracks and gave them free rein.

The sky was full of clouds, but a northerly wind had subsided. We were dressed very warmly and had our feet covered with straw piled on the floor almost up to our knees. We were fairly comfortable and went skimming along the icy trail as the horses warmed up from the exertion.

About a third of the way home, the dark clouds we saw earlier on the horizon, rolled overhead driven by a strong westerly wind. In minutes, we were enveloped in a snow squall that blanked out everything in sight. We should have turned about and gone back to the mainland, but John thought the snow would soon subside. Instead, it came down heavier, whipped by the whistling wind that gathered speed across that vast expanse of ice, with nothing in its path to slow it down.

The tracks we were following became fainter and fainter. By the time we were little more than half way home they were gone. I looked at my brother in panic as he urged the horses onward in what had suddenly become a trackless wasteland. We both strained to see through the blinding snow. It was useless. The blizzard pelted us and stung our faces as the storm seemed to gather strength.

We remembered dark starless nights, when our horses would often follow a winding island road, avoiding dropoffs and stumps, and lead us home through a pitch-black forest, with no direction at all from the driver. Some creatures seem to possess a sixth sense and a strong homing instinct denied to humans. Could the horses now lead us directly to the island? There was no other choice. John rested the reins on the dash. Our lives now depended upon the horses finding the way safely

back home.

But we also had another worry. Would the ice continue to support our weight in the new direction taken by the team? The three weeks delay for my operation had brought us closer to the time when the ice would start to breakup. Constant movement of the water underneath large patches of ice was already eroding its strength. Snow cover made it impossible to see any treacherous spots. I worried that it might give way and we would vanish through a sudden break. All sense of direction was lost as the team trotted steadily onward.

It seemed like an eternity before the snow subsided enough to reveal the lighthouse and island shoreline, only a short distance away. One could feel and see the weakening ice sagging under us from the weight of our horses and sleigh. The horses were on a familiar trail now and we arrived at our farmhouse just as darkness started to close in.

Our parents were relieved to see us safely back home. While I recounted our experience for my mother, John and my father unhitched the horses and gave them a rubdown in the barn. They saw to it that the horses got a well-deserved extra helping of hay and oats. The next day I rewarded each one with a ripe red apple from our fruit cellar. It was a pleasure to hear the two of them whinny contentedly as they munched the fruit.

Chapter VII

Cruise on the *SS Missouri*

All during our childhood, my brother, sisters and I heard fascinating stories about a faraway island in Northern Lake Michigan. It was shown on the map as South Manitou, but our family referred to it simply as, "The Island."

My mother, Louise Hutzler Vent, was born and raised on South Manitou and did not leave the island, until at age sixteen, she traveled to Chicago to live with her older sister, Anna and husband, Fred. She completed her education in the city, where she met and married my father, William P. Vent, a merchant and owner of a dry goods and clothing store.

The transition from an island with no store worthy of the name, to the city with its downtown shopping area, and neighborhood stores, was an agreeable change. However, having a store of her own, stocked with all of the usual merchandise, plus many luxury items she had managed to live without, was a bit like having a personal horn of plenty.

My parents prospered as the family grew to include two girls, Gale and Fay, then two boys, William and Myron. In spite of the busy life my parents led, they saw to it that we children spent many a delightful summer vacation at the old island homestead. After both maternal

grandparents died, my Uncle John took over and continued farming on a limited scale. Both of my parents could not leave their store business at the same time, so my mother usually accompanied us to the island during our childhood years.

It is no longer easy to recall many details of my early visits to the island. It was a carefree time of life, when one could simply anticipate and savor the joy of a new adventure, leaving the planning and details to the grownups. Although it seemed to take forever before we were ready to leave Chicago, the day would finally arrive.

My father checked over his one-cylinder Cadillac touring car to make certain he had plenty of gas and oil. My sister, Gale, freshened the black leather upholstery used exclusively in touring cars, because it was durable and shed the rain. There was seldom ample time to get the bulky top up quickly enough to ward off a sudden shower. The Goodyear tires with the diamond-shaped tread were pumped up to seventy-five pounds, and the brass headlights that my sister, Fay, had polished until they sparkled, were given a final test to make sure they would light up if needed. Powdered carbide was poured into a container mounted on a running board, that produced gas when water



William, on running board, with relatives ready for a 12 mph. joyride in his father's Cadillac touring car. Mounted below, the single cylinder engine's jumbo-size piston had a horizontal stroke. Photo 1909

was added. The gas traveled to the dash and headlights through metal tubing; each burner would light up when the hinged glass front was opened and a lighted match applied. They did not always work on a windy day or if the wrong amount of water was added to the carbide. The lone taillamp used kerosene as fuel because it was more dependable.

Most of the engine was mounted underneath the chassis, and its single-piston traveled forward and backward like on a steam locomotive. Our luggage and a box of gifts from our store for Michigan relatives and friends, were stowed on the floor or strapped onto the running boards. We children piled in the back seat and my parents, in their long linen dusters, sat up front. My father wore his driving cap and my mother had a long silk scarf that went over her large hat and was tied in a knot under her chin to keep things in place.

After adjusting the spark and the throttle, my father would insert the

hand crank in its place on the side of the car and give it a whirl--usually many whirls before the motor would start. Cars were very cantankerous in those days. I don't think the engine had a muffler because it made a frightful racket as my father backed the car out of the garage and chugged eastward toward the lake.

There were few autos on the streets in 1909, but many horses and wagons. My mother was always concerned about the car startling a horse and causing a runaway--a fairly common occurrence at the time. Horses had not yet grown accustomed, to what must have appeared to be a furious black demon, belching smoke and thundering by at all of twelve miles per hour.

It was exciting to see a runaway. Someone would be sure to scream "RUNAWAY!" causing people to pour out of their homes to watch the horse and wagon careening down the street. Other traffic would hasten to get out of the way. Unless some brave

soul ran out and grabbed the horse's bridle to bring it to a halt, it would sometimes keep running until exhausted or the wagon was wrecked.

Fortunately, we arrived at the wharves of the Goodrich Steamship Line, near the old Rush Street bridge, without a mishap. It was there that I had my first glimpse of the *Steamship Missouri* that was to take us to our destination. It seemed to be an immense liner--the biggest ship I had ever seen. The hull was black and the superstructure white. Smoke was already drifting out of its big black smokestack, as the boilers were fired to build up steam pressure, so that it could get under way. There were portholes all along the sides, and below them were several square bulkhead openings for loading coal, freight, and taking on passengers.

An attendant helped us with our luggage as my father guided us onto the gangplank and up the steep stairs to the main deck. He then led us inside to the purser's office where we were given the key to our stateroom. After assuring himself that we were properly taken care of, my father bid us goodbye. A warning blast of the ship's horn alerted visitors to leave. It was also a signal for us to gather on deck and wave farewell to him as he prepared to drive back to the store.

With black smoke now pouring out of the smokestack, the ship shuddered, as the crew maneuvered the huge bulk away from the dock, through the narrow river toward the lake. It was a thrill to be on deck near the bow and feel the cool lake air on my face. Before long, the ship picked up speed and we gradually left the city with its noise and heat far behind.

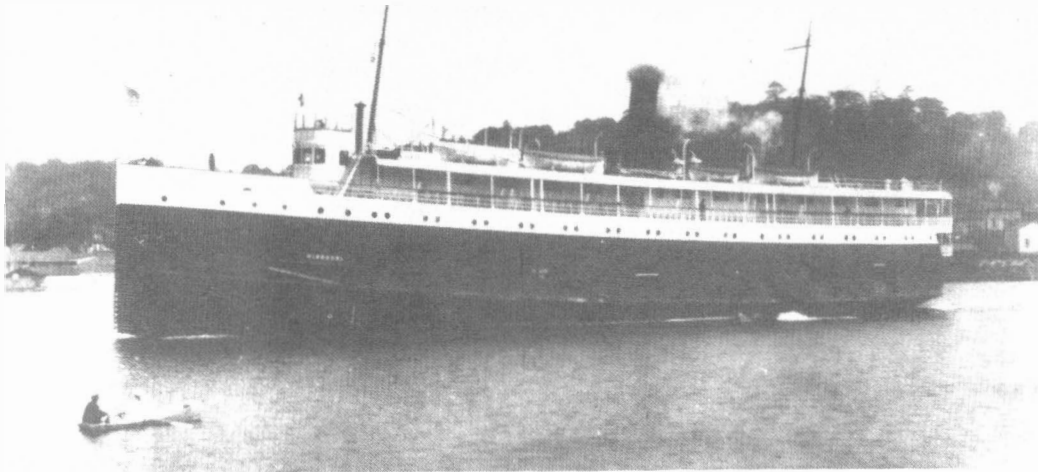
There was much of interest aboard ship for a curious young boy. After first promising to be careful, I lost no time in exploring my exciting new

surroundings. I would liked to have climbed up the steep stairs to the pilothouse, but the "Keep Off" sign discouraged me. The ship was now ploughing ahead, kicking up tall waves and spray, and the propeller churned our wake into a bubbling, turbulent cauldron. I wondered if the lake would ever smooth itself out again and return to an orderly pattern of waves and swells.

There was more to explore inside: I wanted to see what sort of engine could propel this big ship along at such a brisk pace. I poked around the long passageway, lined with shiny wood that creaked incessantly, as the ship competed for progress against the wind and waves. An open doorway beckoned, leading below to the bowels of the ship. One final door and I was on a catwalk overlooking an unearthly scene that rooted me to the spot.

Firemen, stripped to the waist and dripping with sweat, were shoveling coal into the gaping boilers, as fast as they could scoop it up. They kept the raging fires stoked to capacity. The monstrous machinery with huge, oily arms rising and plunging relentlessly, and the propeller shaft spinning in a greasy trough, created a deafening clatter. Acrid smelling oil, hissing steam and coal gas fumes hampered my breathing. The scene, coupled with frightening shadows and reflections from the open boilers, conjured a vision of Satan's infernal region. It was a great relief to climb topside and fill my lungs with cool clean air.

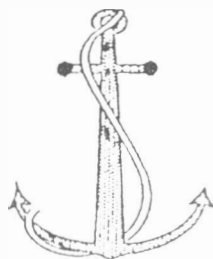
The exercise had spurred my appetite, and I was happy to rejoin my family in the dining room for our evening meal. I still remember the highly polished furniture and piano in the rather opulent salon, where later in the evening, my older sister, Gale, playing the piano, and Fay with her violin, provided an impromptu



Steamship Missouri, built in 1904, length 225 Ft., 2400 gross tons, 1250 horsepower coal-fired steam engines.

concert for our fellow travelers. Both had studied music seriously for several years at a conservatory and played very well together. Included in the program were light classics, waltzes and dance tunes, to the delight of the passengers. My parents were proud to have them share their musical talent, and having an appreciative audience encouraged them to continue with their daily practice. There were no radios as yet, only an occasional phonograph that reproduced voices and music of poor fidelity from scratchy sounding records. Live music was greatly enjoyed and accomplished performers admired.

After a very eventful day I reluctantly trudged back to our stateroom ready for a good nights rest. I remember being disappointed, because the stateroom had a large square window and shutter opening onto the upper deck. I preferred a porthole that would have enabled me to poke my head through, to watch the waves and water rushing by below--maybe even see a big fish. I had been impressed by the ship's captain in his gold-braided uniform, when he paused on the way to the pilothouse, to thank my sisters for their music. I fell asleep completely confident that he would guide the ship safely to its destination.



Chapter VIII

Leelanau Remembrances

World War I interrupted our summer trips up north for a few years, so I enthusiastically greeted my parent's announcement, in 1920, that we were to vacation again on South Manitou--just my mother, younger brother, Myron, and myself. We were to make the overnight lake trip on the *SS Manitou*, a somewhat larger and longer steamship than the *Missouri*. I thought the added length and slightly angled smokestack gave it a racy appearance. "Streamlined" was not yet a household word.

The ship was finished inside with highly polished woodwork, similar to the *Missouri*, that produced the same incessant, creaking sounds when it was underway. I guided my brother through the maze of passageways, showing him all of the interesting sights he was seeing for the first time. We went below looking for the engine room, but there was a big "Keep Out" sign on the door leading to the catwalk inside, so I could not show him the fascinating scene of the engine room I had discovered several years earlier on the *Missouri*.

After a busy day we returned to our stateroom, arguing over who would get to sleep in the upper berth. My mother settled the argument by deciding that Myron might fall if he awakened suddenly during the night and momentarily forgot where he

was. I concluded that an older brother did have an advantage now and then.

We were up on deck bright and early the next morning, anxious to see the Michigan shoreline, but it was shrouded by an early morning mist. Our ship's foghorn was announcing our presence, sounding out its warning signal at regular intervals. In between blasts, we could faintly hear other vessels or shore stations answering, each with its own distinctive sound.

About mid-morning the mist lifted and the bright sunshine disclosed, what for us, has always been a land of enchantment and delight. The shore was lined with massive sand dunes, forming a background for the contrasting green shades of pine, juniper and lighter colored shrubbery, tenaciously struggling to bind together the constantly shifting sand. This spectacular creation of ice, wind and water seemed to beckon us to come ashore and conquer those heights, just as it has lured adventurers for centuries. We looked for the south slope of the enormous Sleeping Bear Sand Dune, where lesser dunes taper down to the water's edge, at the North Bar Lake sandbar opening to our Aunt Kate's farm. We imagined that we could see her husband, Leonard, watching

through his spyglass to see if our ship was arriving on schedule. Almost immediately, we heard the ship's whistle blast, and the *Manitou*, like a prim dowager, made a wide circle to starboard around Sleeping Bear Point and docked neatly at Glen Haven.

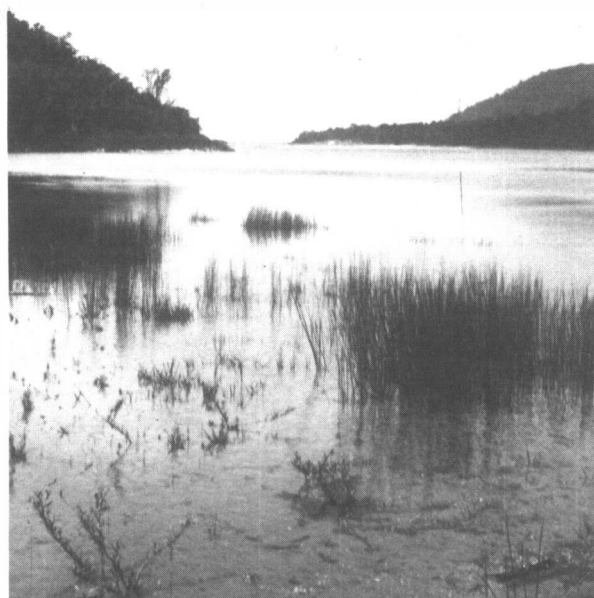
The long gray dock, with its typical weatherbeaten wood odor, was a beehive of activity while passengers disembarked and freight was unloaded. We became part of the commotion as we struggled with our suitcases and looked expectantly toward the sandy road for our Uncle Miller in his 1918 Buick touring car. He was already coming toward us, and after a hearty greeting, took one of our suitcases in each hand and then tucked another one under each arm as though they weighed only a few ounces. His wife, our jolly Aunt

Jess, with her perpetual smile, was also there to greet us. Uncle Miller was a big, strong man with a ruddy, weathered complexion he acquired from years of outside work as County Commissioner of Roads.

All of us managed to squeeze into the Buick along with our luggage, and Myron and I were able to sit up front where we could watch our uncle shift gears and operate the pedals, throttle and spark levers. A large steering wheel and plenty of muscle was required to turn the heavy wooden front wheels with their high pressure tires. Driving a car was strictly a man's job in those days.

To return to their home in Empire, uncle headed for the narrows at Glen Lake. Some sections of the sandy road were deeply rutted. If one halted in a soft spot, it was almost impossible to get going again, unless

North Bar Lake.



there were some tree limbs or boards handy to lay in the ruts for traction. Passengers often had to get out and help push the car onto firm ground. Uncle was adept at avoiding the treacherous ruts and we were lucky to get by other heavy cars unfortunate enough to be stalled. The Model T Fords, being lighter in weight, seldom got bogged down and uncle remarked that they just seemed to skim across the surface. They were very popular for that reason as well as for their low price.

After passing through Glen Arbor and turning toward Empire, uncle told us how he hoped to build a shortcut someday, to run between Sleeping Bear Dunes and the west end of Glen Lake. The road was built a few years later and is now known as State Highway 109.

Our plan was to spend a few days in Empire at our widowed Aunt Maggie's home, before leaving for our Aunt Kate's farm on North Bar Lake, only a few miles north of Empire. A highlight of our visit was attending an Old Settlers picnic on the shore of beautiful Glen Lake, where we met many of our cousins for the first time.

Aunt Maggie was a tall, slim dignified woman. When she walked into a room, with her erect, aristocratic bearing, she automatically commanded respect. A neighbor once remarked that Aunt Maggie stood so straight it often looked as if she was leaning backward. She wore dark-colored Victorian-style dresses and starched petticoats that rustled and made a swishing sound whenever she moved about. She was also a very good cook and had baked a crock full of sugar cookies just for my brother and for me. We had her permission to help ourselves and I'm afraid we abused

the privilege because they were so very good. In spite of her reserve, she was a very loving person and there was a strong bond between us. She was my favorite aunt. Years later, when she was failing fast, it was very hard to say goodbye, knowing that it might be for the last time.

Our Aunt Kate was entirely different from her sister, Maggie. She was a very determined individual and the only person I ever met who had a kitchen floor, "so clean one could eat off of it." She scrubbed it every morning before breakfast while her husband, Leonard, was out doing his early morning chores. The hard maple flooring was actually bleached white and glistened like marble. The other rooms in the farmhouse were almost antiseptically clean. The parlor was nearly always closed off with the shades drawn and used only for special visitors and on rare occasions.

The center of attraction for my brother and for me was an early Edison phonograph, with a big metal horn, that reproduced sounds from records shaped like a cylinder. I was delighted when Aunt Kate allowed me to play it. Before she agreed, I had to promise not to wind the motor too tight and not to scratch a record by sliding the needle across it. Much of what came out of the horn was unintelligible, but we were fascinated by it. Because the parlor was kept closed off and denied the sunlight, it seemed to be almost tomblike. Years later, if I entered a building that had been closed for a long time, the stale air triggered a nostalgic memory of a darkened parlor and a tinny-sounding phonograph, spilling out music and words I was straining to hear.

Uncle Leonard was a jovial farmer

with a wrinkled, weatherbeaten face framing a perpetual smile. When he laughed his twinkling eyes became mere slits, and one was often distracted by concentrating on his amusing facial expressions instead of absorbing his conversation. His words seemed to originate in his diaphragm and were forced out a few at a time in short bursts. His exuberant personality was completely opposite to that of Aunt Kate.

When we asked her if she wasn't afraid to stay in the farmhouse alone, while uncle was out somewhere in the field, she replied that she was not. The only time it became necessary for her to call him for help was when a roving Indian would come by asking for fire-water and refuse to leave unless he got some. She had a loaded shotgun in the nearby milkshed, but I doubt if she would have remained standing had she fired it. Auntie was only about five feet tall and did not weigh over a hundred pounds, but what she lacked in size was more than balanced by her spirit. The word, fear, was not in her vocabulary. She tended her own vegetable garden and nurtured a large patch of petunias and other flowers that thrived in the sandy soil. Myron and I were given the task of flicking off any unwary bugs, unlucky enough to invade her garden, into a tin can with a little kerosene in it. She would not use any pesticide on produce destined for the table.

If she saw any crows alighting near her precious vegetables, we would be startled to hear a bloodcurdling yell that one would swear could not possibly come from such a small person. Myron and I were out near the barn the first time we heard it and we both came running toward

the house expecting to see it going up in flames. We only saw our mother on the front porch laughing heartily at our fright. She was familiar with her sister's lung power and had anticipated our reaction.

Although her sight was failing and her glasses were always askew, she kept a sharp lookout for flies and mosquitos which she would not tolerate in her house. If she happened to suspect there was a fly intruding into her sterile environment, Myron or I would be ordered to find it. If we succeeded she would yell, "Kill the beast," in her unearthly manner reserved for crows and insects.

But Aunt Kate enjoyed tending her garden and continued growing her own vegetables even after falling and breaking her hip. She used an old kitchen chair with the back missing to steady herself while hoeing out weeds. Always very frail looking, she claimed to have leakage of the heart so badly she could hear the blood go "drrrip, drrrip, drrrip," every time she climbed a flight of stairs. Of course, she couldn't, but Myron and I were duly impressed as she rolled her "rrrs" each time she came to the drip episode. We were also fascinated to hear how lightning had struck the house during a severe thunderstorm. It came in a first floor window right next to where Aunt Kate was standing at the time, flashed by her up the stairs to the second floor and departed through an open window, going right through a rolled-up window shade. She proved it by lowering the shade, with a dramatic flourish. Sure enough, there was the telltale pattern of burnt holes. We never tired of hearing her stories and wondered why all the thrilling events had to happen so far from our city



Aunt Kate in white dress, with husband, Uncle Lenoard and Aunt Maggie, at Glen Lake Picnic, summer of 1920

home.

Myron and I made friends immediately with Shep, their three-legged dog. The animal had somehow become entangled in a wire fence as he tried to jump over it. When he failed to return for his evening meal and did not come when called, Uncle Leonard went looking for him. By the time he found him the poor animal was almost dead, hanging by his broken hind leg. Uncle carried him home and nursed him back to health, but circulation did not return to the leg and it could not be saved. It soon withered away and the dog assisted nature in removing the useless remnant. The muscles of the other hind leg developed rapidly and grew so strong that he was able to run and get around nearly as well as before the accident.

He was still ready to help Uncle Leonard herd the cows to the barn each evening. A small area of the pasture that bordered the lake

became rather boggy during heavy rains. Occasionally, a stray cow would sink into the muck and have trouble getting out. If Shep was nearby, he would sound an alarm by barking and running excitedly back and forth toward the trapped animal, until uncle got his team of horses and a rope to help pull the cow to firmer ground.

To make sure we stayed away from that boggy spot, it was always referred to as quicksand. We needed no further warning because the word conjured up scenes from an old movie, showing a scoundrel being sucked down into a marsh until the only thing visible was a floating hat. My brother and I were very fond of this friendly dog and spent many happy hours romping through the woods and around the lakeshore, with Shep tagging along.

Northern Michigan is famous for its cherries and Aunt Kate had both sweet and sour varieties. Our favorite

tree was near the farmhouse; it was loaded with big, ripe, purple Bing cherries and we had permission to eat as many as we wanted. Myron and I climbed the tree and ate cherries until our stomachs rebelled. After resting our insides for a day or so, we were back in the tree again, satisfying a craving that only freshly plucked cherries could fulfill. We hoped that the cherries would also be ripe on South Manitou, which was to be our final destination.

Early on the morning we were to leave for the island, Uncle Leonard hitched up a pair of his chestnut colored horses to a fringed-top buggy, that was roomy enough for the five of us and all of our luggage. It took considerably longer for us to reach Glen Haven than in Uncle Miller's Buick, but there was no danger of our getting stalled along the way in soft sand.

There were a couple of fishing boats tied up to the pier. The hardy fishermen had already brought their catch to the market and were preparing to return to their home ports. My mother recognized one of the owners who agreed to take us along on his return trip to South Manitou. My aunt and uncle helped us transfer our luggage to the boat and bid us goodbye as we scrambled aboard.

It was a craft about thirty feet long with a very wide beam and a rounded bottom. Although very roomy and seaworthy, it tended to roll a lot even in a moderate sea. The cabin reeked of fish, fuel odors and exhaust from the noisy, wheezing, single-cylinder engine that powered the boat.

The fisherman, with the help of his two young sons, about eight and ten years old, had cleaned the fish and

prepared them earlier for the market. He was obviously very tired, so he turned over the wheel to his ten year old boy and went below to take a much needed nap.

The sun had not yet burned off the early morning fog that completely obscured both North and South Manitou Islands. As we entered the deep channel, no longer in the lee of the mainland, the sea picked up and the boat started to rock constantly from side to side, like a walnut shell in a small pool. The wind and waves were coming from the south and we were traveling westward, almost parallel to them. Before long, Myron and I became very seasick. We both regretted eating the bag of cherries we had brought along with us.

The trip across the channel was to have taken about an hour and a half, but when the fog lifted at that point, we discovered that we were miles off course opposite North Manitou Island. At the same time the owner woke up and stormed out of the cabin, yelling to his son to: "Put the wheel hard to port." Then he took over the helm himself and swung the boat around in the direction of South Island away from some hazardous shoals.

We were now plowing through the waves head-on and the rocking diminished. It was a relief to enter the calm water of South Manitou's harbor and see the tall, white lighthouse with its reassuring beacon. We tied up at the Coastguard dock, happy to be on firm ground again.

The roundabout trip across the lake had been prolonged to three hours, about twice as long as it should have taken. It seemed much longer to a couple of very seasick young boys.

Chapter IX

The Old Homestead

We were welcomed to South Manitou by our Uncle Jim, the lighthouse keeper, his wife, our Aunt Lill and their five children, ranging in age from about two to eight years. They lived in a well-built brick house, joined to the lighthouse tower by a hallway with windows on both sides.

After a cup of tea to settle our stomachs, we felt much better. Aunt Lill insisted we spend the night with them and postpone our visit with Uncle John at the old homestead for a day or so. Myron and I had never lived at the lighthouse, so we were delighted with this new experience. Our cousins were anxious to show us around; we began by exploring the area near the lighthouse.

The beach at that point was very sandy, perfect for bathing and we readily agreed to go swimming later. Meanwhile, we walked toward the nearby Coast Guard Station, on a boardwalk made with two, thick, ten-inch-wide planks laid side-by-side. At intervals along the way, single planks led to cottages that made up the small settlement. The sandy desert-like landscape was softened by a row of Lombardy poplar trees and low-growing juniper bushes. Here and there, a clump of grass struggled for a toehold in the shifting sand.

The station was a spacious two-story frame building, home to about

ten coastguardsmen. It was the largest in a group of structures that included a boathouse, big enough to hold a powerboat, and a smaller surfboat that was propelled by oars. Both were held upright on cradles with flanged wheels that ran on rails down a ramp to the lake. We watched as the surfboat was launched by several crewmen. It gathered speed as it sped down the incline, losing momentum quickly as it hit the water. It looked like a lot of fun to us, but the life-saving crew took their frequent drills very seriously. The South Manitou Coastguardsmen were well-trained for any emergency.

We sauntered back toward the lighthouse, passing the lookout tower manned twenty-four hours a day. After waving to the crewman on watch we hurried on to the lighthouse to don our swimsuits. As we passed the roomy outhouse to the rear of the dwelling, Myron decided to heed nature's call. The sparkling white structure was equipped with a long seat having about six round holes, ranging in size from small to large. As he entered, several of our cousins trooped inside with him. Being accustomed to the privacy of our city bathroom and individual conveniences, my brother objected to this sudden show of togetherness. He was overruled by one of the girls who



William with mother, Louise, in cornfield, 1920

said, "It's alright, Myron, we are your cousins, you know." There was no enthusiasm on our part for this island custom. We both managed to perform when others were absent--cousins or not.

The powdery sand beach near the lighthouse sloped gently into the water and we could wade into the lake for over a hundred feet before getting beyond our depth. Unlike the numbing cold temperature of the water in the deep harbor, this shallow area, warmed by the sun, was delightfully refreshing. We were reluctant to come ashore when called, until Uncle Jim reminded us that we could accompany him after supper when he lit the lighthouse

beacon.

The tower, built in 1871, was one of the tallest and most beautiful on the Great Lakes. Gleaming white inside and out, it towered about one hundred feet above the water level, tapering upwards to the beacon, encircled by a catwalk with a protective iron railing. Inside, a black, iron, winding stairway led to the top. A few small windows admitted light, creating weird shadows on the stark white walls. Our footsteps and conversation were amplified and reverberated in that strange setting. It was a relief to reach the top.

We stepped outside on the catwalk for an exciting view of the harbor with its crescent-shaped beach,

nearby North Manitou Island, and the undulating mainland shore in the distance. The shallow water mirrored various hues of green, gradually blending into the deeper water blues. Whitecaps, endlessly breaking on shore, looked much less formidable from our high perch.

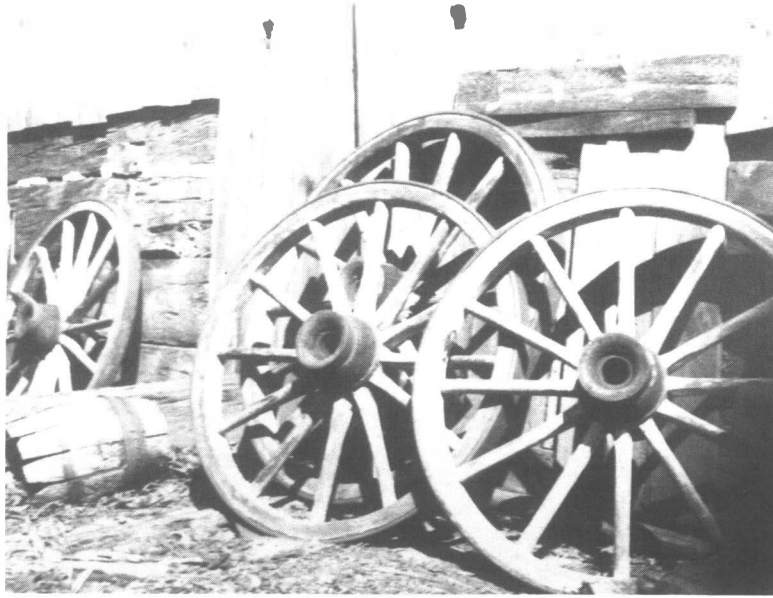
Inside again, we watched as Uncle Jim lit a large kerosene lamp and placed it inside a thick prism that dispersed the brilliant light as far as twenty miles on a clear night. Everything in that little space was kept spotless--not even a fingerprint on the lamp chimney or prism was allowed. The rest of the lighthouse was also kept painstakingly clean. My brother and I had to remove our shoes and pour out any accumulated sand before entering the tower. Emptying sand from our shoes was a

ritual performed several times a day during our island vacation.

Early the next morning we were awakened by a loud roar that almost shook the bed. It was the guttural blast of South Manitou's foghorn, housed in a wooden structure near the lighthouse, operated by the U.S. Coast Guard. The building contained two wood-burning steam boilers that provided the pressure to blow the deep-throated horn for about twenty seconds every minute. As the end of each bellow approached, the pitch lowered suddenly, giving the island signal its own distinctive sound. The boilers consumed many cords of hardwood piled nearby in four foot lengths. Quiet returned again when the fog lifted as we prepared to leave for our final visit to the old homestead, our mother's birthplace.

Old ice house in maple forest





Nineteenth century "spares"

Uncle John, three years older than my mother, had remained on the farm after our grandparents died. He had reduced the herd of livestock along with the acreage to be tilled. We had expected him to pick us up with a horse and buggy, but when he did not arrive by mid-afternoon, my mother decided to walk the three miles to the farm. We left our heavy luggage at the lighthouse and brought along only a light suitcase, plus a few essential supplies. Uncle John would pickup the heavy items later.

It was a warm July day and the hot sun made us quite uncomfortable as we plodded inland away from the lakeshore breeze. My mother knew of a shortcut through a wooded area she used as a girl, but the old footpath had disappeared and the underbrush made the going tough. The light suitcase I was carrying became heavier with each step and we were all getting very thirsty. Myron and I were told to be patient

and that we would soon come to the old schoolhouse where we could get a drink of water. The encouragement spurred us on, and before long were pumping some rather cloudy liquid into a rusty tin cup. At the time, it seemed to be the best water we had ever tasted.

Hiking the remaining mile or so to the farm was less arduous, through a lightly wooded area on a hard gravel road bordered by ferns. The last sunny portion of the road had wild blackberry bushes growing along one side. The berries were ripe and sweet and we stopped awhile to eat our fill and to rest. The trail soon disappeared into a hardwood forest surrounding the farm, and after following the winding path among the tall trees, we finally came to the old farmhouse. It had been built in the center of a broad meadow around the time of the Civil War.

We were tired, hungry and thirsty, but came to a quick halt when we opened the door to the big kitchen.



Authors' sister, Gale, and cousin, George, drawing water from sixty-foot-deep open well, in 1909. Dug by hand about 1865, the sides were shored-up with hand-hewn timbers

Cats seemed to be running up the walls and flying through the air in all directions. We stood there in shocked silence while the startled cats ran out an opening in the wall at the other end of the room. Uncle John had just finished eating his supper which he had cooked on the still hot, wood-burning kitchen stove. The heat, disorder and primitive surroundings were too much for my brother and me to accept all at once. Alone with our mother upstairs, we said we wanted to go home. She did not reveal her feelings, but suggested that we go outside and look around while she

made our supper.

We met uncle on the way to the well to get some fresh water. He showed us how to slowly lower the water bucket, fastened to a thick rope that ran through an overhead pulley, into the open sixty-foot-deep well. He cautioned us to hold onto the rope tightly when we pulled up the heavy bucket of water, so that the rope would not burn our palms if it suddenly slipped through our hands. There was an old wooden washtub nearby that was kept full of fresh water for his two horses. A board trough several feet long, ran from the

fenced-in well to the big tub. Hauling up water and filling the tub for the horses was a job we liked. It was to be our responsibility for the rest of our visit.

When we returned to the farmhouse our mother had already tidied up the kitchen, put a new brightly colored oilcloth on the table and had some ham, potatoes and vegetables cooking over a crackling fire. She had not forgotten any part of her girlhood training. Our meal was topped off with cookies and milk and we began to feel better. The island temperature drops quickly when the sun goes down and the cool evening air blowing through the open windows revived our spirits.

After a good nights sleep we were ready to hunt for eggs the chickens tried to hide in the bushes near the barn. Although allowed out of the coop in the daytime, the flock would always return to roost at sunset. They were contrary critters though and insisted on laying eggs in unlikely places. We were usually successful in outwitting them, but years earlier, when I was exploring in the big barn, I opened an outside door leading to a horse's stall, and a very angry red hen brushed against my head as she fled toward daylight, with egg streaming from her tail feathers. I was very careful after that not to interrupt a hen doing her duty.

Uncle John had two big, white, draft horses, the larger one named Boy, and the smaller, Jessie. He noticed our interest as we watched him harness Jessie for the buggy ride to pick up our luggage at the lighthouse, and agreed to let my brother and me go along. Both horses were fed the same food and grazed in the same pasture, but Jessie had a digestive system that seemed to produce large amounts of

gas she expelled in short bursts whenever exerting herself. We thought it was hilarious and would snicker uncontrollably every time we went for a ride. Although my mother told us to just ignore the noise, we could not restrain our mirth as Jessie trotted along putt, putting at regular intervals.

The other horse, Boy, was a calm, good-natured animal and my brother and I would always pet him whenever we had a chance. We discovered that he liked a piece of bread with a little salt sprinkled on it; after a few days he would come for a morsel when we called his name. I gazed up at his back, longingly, and wondered if he would let me ride him, but I could not possibly get up there from the ground. Then, one day I got a rope from the barn and tied the ends to each side of his halter, the only harness he was wearing. Leading him to a criss-cross, split-log fence at one end of the pasture, I climbed onto the fence and pulled myself up onto his back. The Indians made bareback riding look easy, but I had a hard time just trying to keep from sliding off his broad back. Nevertheless, he would trot around the pasture for me and turn either left or right when I pulled on the rope, even though he had no bit in his mouth. I was quite proud of my accomplishment and performed a few times for my mother and uncle.

The routine was abruptly changed one day as I was riding him near the forest. Boy seemed to be rather nervous and so was Jessie who was nearby nibbling grass. They seemed to sense some unknown danger. All at once their ears stood straight up and both horses took off at a gallop across the meadow, with me holding

onto Boy's mane for dear life, pulling on the rope and yelling, "Whoa! Whoa!" Suddenly, the rope came loose from one side of the halter, and my frantic pulling on the other side caused Boy to go around in a tight circle and come to a halt. I slid to the ground, untied the other end of the rope and both horses ran away.

I had only taken a few steps homeward when I discovered the reason for their strange behavior. A neighbor in his Model T Ford had driven over for a visit and the horses were spooked by the unfamiliar sound. With their sensitive hearing,

they had picked up the rumble of the auto's exhaust long before I saw the car emerge from the woods.

After my close call horseback riding, I agreed to go fishing with Myron, who had stumbled across Uncle John's fishing tackle in the barn. Uncle selected some lines, sinkers and small hooks suitable for catching perch that we had seen in large numbers in the crystal-clear water below the old pier. We tried digging for worms near the house under the sweet cherry trees, but could not find any in the sandy island soil. My mother suggested we use

Fourteen-year-old William, riding uncle's workhorse, 1920



some of the abundant grasshoppers and it proved to be good advice. We also picked a bag of the big red and yellow sweet cherries to bring along with us. They looked like plums and were almost as large. By the time we had trudged a mile to the pier they were gone.

The perch eagerly went for the grasshoppers. We watched the fish in the clear lake water competing with one another for our bait and tempted the big ones by dangling the hook near their mouths. In less than an hour we caught about a dozen fair-sized perch. The fish had to be scaled and cleaned so that my mother could prepare them for supper, so we temporarily hung them on a peg about five feet high outside the stormhouse.

After being gone only a short time, we returned to find that there were only a few fish remnants left. The cats had discovered the feast, ran up the side of the house, grabbed a fish and hung on until they dislodged it and then fell to the ground along with their snack. It suddenly became clear why there was a twinkle in Uncle John's eye when he saw us hanging up our catch. Myron and I decided that it was more fun fishing for the cats than for the table, so we tried our luck at the old pier almost every day. We hung the fish in the same place and then stood back to watch the cats do their acrobatics. They lost their mistrust of us and allowed us to pet them--which also pleased our uncle.

My mother would go visiting her former neighbors occasionally and one evening was invited to a party given by some of her old friends. They reminisced until it was quite late and dark. Because it was so late, she would not let them hitch up their

horse and buggy and insisted on walking home, taking a special shortcut she used years ago.

About halfway home she paused for a minute to put on a sweater and laid her pocketbook on the ground. At the same time some nearby cattle bellowed and moved closer to her. It was so dark she could barely make out their outline and was startled to suddenly find a cow only a few feet from her. Instinctively, she moved away from it, momentarily forgetting about her purse. When the cow moved on she tried to retrieve her purse, which was now just another dark spot in the pasture pockmarked with cowchips. It soon became clear that she could not find her purse in pitchblack darkness. She made a mental note of the location and hurried homeward.

I was sound asleep when she awakened me to tell of her misplaced handbag containing the tickets and money needed for our return trip to Chicago. We decided to get one of uncle's kerosene lanterns and return immediately to the pasture, about a half mile away. Uncle was goodnatured about being awakened at midnight and we were soon on our way. The lantern cast eerie shadows as we made our way through the woods and past the cemetery. Nocturnal birds and animals we disturbed, sounded their alarm, and surroundings so familiar in the daytime took on a ghostly appearance in the darkness.

Arriving at the approximate location, I marked a spot with a tree branch, and with the lantern swinging in my hand, walked forward about one hundred feet, then back to a line three feet away from the starting point. I continued with this pattern and soon found the handbag. My

mother was very much relieved. Her praise made me feel quite grownup and important. Uncle John was glad to get back to sleep after we returned and so was I. The last thing I remember my mother saying to me was, "Just don't tell your father about this."

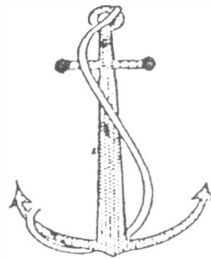
As our vacation drew to a close, Myron and I were told we could catch a chicken for our final Sunday dinner. After much commotion, we cornered a sassy rooster and took it behind the barn, where my mother was waiting next to a big block of wood, with a hatchet in her hand. The squawking rooster must have surmised what was about to happen, because he would not keep his head flat on the block. Every time my mother raised the hatchet he would also raise his head, postponing the execution.

Could I please hold his head down, flat on the block, while she wielded that deadly weapon? No way would I agree to hold my fingers so close to the descending hatchet. We compromised. I found a piece of rope, tied it around the rooster's neck and pulled it down on the block as the execution took place. My brother and I bolted for cover as the reflex action

of the headless body caused it to instantly jump around on the ground, as though it was coming after us. The rooster proved to be as tough in death as in life. I concluded that going to the butcher shop was preferable to the messy country system.

My father surprised us by arriving a few days later to assist us on our trip back to Chicago. He accompanied us around the farm while we recounted our discoveries and adventures. We coaxed him to sample several different varieties of cherries which by now had fully ripened. He was especially fond of some dark-purple sweet cherries, growing on the only tree of its kind in the whole orchard. They were almost black in color and the juicy pulp overflowed with nectar. It was the first time I had ever seen my father climb a tree. I remember thinking at the time, that it was rather undignified for a respectable businessman to be climbing trees with such obvious enjoyment.

As I walked by that same spot many, many years later, I pondered on what I would now give to see him once again up there in his favorite cherry tree.



Chapter X

Bertha Peth

If anyone deserved to be called “Queen of the Island,” it surely would have been Bertha Peth. She was born in Germany in 1873 and brought to this country while still very young. After her mother died, her father remarried. Unhappily, the step-mother treated her cruelly. Nevertheless, Bertha grew up to be a beautiful young woman, with big brown eyes and long dark hair. She claimed to have worked, at one time, winding capacitors at the Western Electric Company, and was convinced that the vertical lines on her fingernails resulted from handling the raw material.

She came to South Manitou from Chicago the summer of 1898, employed as a nursemaid by Uncle John’s niece, Kitty, who had grown up on the farm as a sister to him and to my mother. Before the summer was over, John was inescapably attracted to this vivacious, lively, young woman, whose personality was completely opposite to his own quiet, taciturn nature. They were married and happily settled down on the farm that uncle had taken over after his parents died.

About a year after the marriage, Bertha gave birth to a healthy boy whom she named, Stanley. He flourished until he was about two years old. Then one day, while

Bertha was entertaining her friends in the farmhouse, Stanley slipped through the fence where the cattle were pastured and was trampled on by a bull.

For several weeks the boy hovered between life and death. In an attempt to save his life, Bertha sailed with him to Chicago, but the doctors there could do little for him and he died shortly thereafter of internal complications.

The island community blamed Bertha for her carelessness in allowing the boy to wander off. The harsh judgment, augmented by vile gossip, doomed the marriage and John reluctantly applied for and was granted a divorce.

Bertha was overwhelmed by her problems and had spells of hysteria, prompting her to run away into the forest until she collapsed. Help had to be summoned to find her and carry her to the Coast Guard Station for medical attention. She sailed back to Chicago, living with a relative for awhile, but could not adjust to city life and eventually returned to the island, working as a nursemaid for another island family.

She remained on the island for the rest of her life, living in a house she acquired in the little settlement near the Coast Guard Station. Bertha had what she called a store in an



Driftwood on the beach

upstairs bedroom, with space for two tiny showcases propped up on orange crates. They contained a few packages of chewing gum, candy, and an assortment of cheap jewelry and trinkets. She insisted on proudly showing off her store everytime I visited the island. Whenever I tried to buy something she would refuse to accept any money for it. I reached a point where I simply admired her stock, but did not try to buy anything.

Her main income seemed to be from ginseng roots she gathered in the forest and sold to a pharmaceutical firm. The plants are hard to spot on the shady forest floor, but Bertha became very adept at locating them. She also collected aluminum and wooden fishnet floats that had loosened and washed ashore, to be sold for a few pennies each.

Like a will-o'-the-wisp, she roamed all over the island, emerging

as an apparition out of the thick underbrush, or suddenly appearing from out of nowhere on an old wagon trail. A cheery greeting and a display of her day's lucky find, quickly dispelled any uneasiness a stranger might feel at meeting Bertha for the first time.

She had a few chickens, a small vegetable garden and knew where all of the best berry patches were located. Apple, cherry and other fruit-bearing trees, scattered around the island, provided fresh fruit for the table. Any surplus was cooked on her wood-burning kitchen stove and preserved in glass jars for later use.

Bertha also had access to produce such as corn and potatoes, growing in Uncle John's big garden, that she had no room to raise in her own limited space. In return for a regular supply of baked bread, uncle provided Bertha with all of the flour



Bertha's house, 1954

she required and replenished her woodpile whenever necessary. When he was away on the mainland, she walked the three miles from her house to the farm, even in winter, to feed his cats and check the buildings to see that everything was in good order. This strange partnership lasted throughout their entire lives.

My mother had always been fond of Bertha and was greatly distressed by the tragic events that led to the eventual breakup of the marriage. She tried several times to patch things up between the couple, but interference from uncle's island friends made failure inevitable.

Bertha corresponded regularly with my mother, and her letters, written with a unique combination of

phonetic and proper spelling, often provided us with a challenging puzzle to decipher. She had a tendency to skip from one subject to another in one sentence. Eventually, the meaning became rather obvious, if not always crystal clear.

My mother frequently included some money along with her replies and often sent Bertha her unneeded, but still serviceable clothing. Anything we sent was always gratefully acknowledged. When my mother became too frail to do her own letter writing, I did it for her and gradually inherited the entertaining task of corresponding with this garrulous island recluse. Her salutation was always: "Dear Buddy and nefew," and her letters closed

with her name, followed by, “lov lov lov lov.” She persisted in calling me by my childhood nickname all of her life and always referred to me as her “nefew,” legality notwithstanding.

The arrival of the mailboat was the big event of the day, and Bertha was usually there to greet visitors to the island and pickup her mail. She had her name added to countless mailing lists, just to experience the feeling of importance when her name was called out to be handed a letter by the mailman. It is doubtful if anyone sending her a letter could imagine the joy and anticipation she felt when receiving mail.

First time visitors to the island were shocked to meet Bertha, in one of her compulsive urges, dressed in a rainbow of colors, topped off with anything from a sunbonnet to a milliner’s bad dream; well-worn tennis shoes completed the picture. A flickering kerosene lamp in her bare-bones cottage gave off very little light and was not very helpful when she

applied her makeup; her face was usually streaked with white flour or face powder if she happened to have any. To see those big eyes staring at you, the unruly hair streaming down from underneath her hat and a lipstick-lined mouth at variance with nature’s contour, was a startling experience. But when this vision began to do an impromptu song and dance, upon recognizing a favorite neighbor or friend returning to the island, the effect was electrifying--one did not know whether to join in or to flee.

The Scouts and Campfire Girls who summer-camped on the island were probably Bertha’s most ardent fans. The elder ones, returning for a second time, would usually tell the newcomers about the strange but loveable island character. They would crowd around her at the dock, chattering away and exchange stories of events that took place since their last meeting. Any strangeness vanished almost at once as Bertha

Bertha Peth, 1954 snapshot



pointed out the spots where she had recently found a Petosky stone or some floats, or any of the interesting things the campers look for along the shore while beachcombing. She would promise to visit their camp and tell them stories, rich with myths and legends recalled from deep recesses of her mind, often beginning in mythology, but moving freely back and forth from ancient to modern times.

She would start out in a normal tone of voice, build up to a crescendo, then, when the suspense became unbearable, drop her voice suddenly to a whisper as she brought the story to an unexpected or hilarious ending. She had a supply of scary ghost stories to tell around a campfire and dramatized scenes that were sometimes reminiscent of Shakespeare.

We always wrote to Bertha to let her know when we would arrive on the island for a visit. She never failed to meet us at the dock, and after doing her spontaneous jig and singing out her joy at our safe arrival, would invite us to her house for a soft drink. Having no ice, the warm soda-pop might explode if the can was not opened carefully.

Her kitchen was probably added on as an afterthought when the small house was built many years ago. The floor consisted of rough boards with cracks between them. It wasn't necessary to sweep the floor often, because the sand that was tracked in simply disappeared through the cracks. Occasionally, a stray plant or a tree-shoot would grow up through the openings. If it was off to one side where it would not be trampled on, Bertha welcomed the intrusion by pouring a little water on it to encourage growth. She also fed the

squirrels and chipmunks that came to her backdoor regularly looking for a handout. The chipmunks were very tame and would nibble on a cracker she held out to them.

Years earlier, a farmer leaving the island, gave Bertha a piano. I had taken lessons for several years and she wanted me to play for her. It had not been tuned since it was brought to the island decades ago. Some of the ivory on the keys was missing, several of the keys did not work at all and a few hammers struck the wrong strings. She liked lively music, so I started to play a popular novelty called, "Kitten on the Keys." I was totally unprepared for the racket that followed. The composer himself could not have recognized his own composition. But it did not faze Bertha. She stomped her foot to keep time with the barely recognizable beat.

After I tried out a couple of other pieces with the same result, Bertha, who was ready and anxious to demonstrate her ability, took over at the keyboard. She could not read notes, but chorded as it was called, at the same time singing, in a cracked voice, songs she heard over the years. I asked her what had happened inside of the piano that caused it to act as it did. It seems that the tame chipmunks took a liking to the piano and made their nest inside of it. She didn't have the heart to chase them outside into the cold.

Inasmuch as Bertha had no radio, her contact with the outside world was limited to whatever she learned from visitors to the island and the few remaining residents, plus an occasional newspaper and magazine. As time went by, there was one period of twenty-two years when she did not set a foot off of the island.

Along about 1950, a friendly coastguardsman's wife persuaded Bertha to go across the lake to the mainland and drive with them to Traverse City. They did a lot of window shopping, had their meals at restaurants and went sightseeing. The most amazing sight for Bertha was the number of automobiles that had mushroomed since her last trip to a city during the depression years. She was quite impressed by the abundance and variety of merchandise on display, previously encountered only in a mailorder catalog.

This same compassionate couple wrote to me, explaining that they, along with a few friends, were accumulating a fund to purchase a

battery radio for Bertha. My family and I were delighted to be included in the surprise. We later received a snapshot of Bertha holding her radio, surrounded by her friends whose generosity made it possible. Early battery radios were very heavy and cumbersome, but her model used a compact, long-lasting battery pack that she was able to order by mail and connect to the radio without help.

She was delighted with her new contact with the outside world, especially during the long, cold winter months, when one dared not venture outside in the deep snow. The radio became her most cherished possession, used constantly for the remaining years of her life.



Bertha, holding radio, surrounded by friends. Photo early 1950's

Chapter XI

Uncle John's Funeral

On August 7, 1944, a telegram from an island neighbor and a phone call from a Leland relative, brought the news of Uncle John's death. A neighbor girl returning home from berry picking, discovered his body, sprawled on the ground near the pump along side a pail of water. The exertion on that hot summer's day was more than his seventy-nine year old heart could tolerate. The girl ran home to tell her father, who immediately got into his old Model T Ford and drove to the Coast Guard Station for help. From there, the body was taken across the lake to Glen Haven, where the waiting undertaker transferred it to Leland.

Neither of my parents was able to withstand a trip to Leland, and with Myron serving in the army in wartorn Europe, it became necessary for me to leave at once for the island. My Chicago firm was involved in the war effort, but after spending several hours at the office rescheduling assignments, phoning relatives and making funeral arrangements in Leland, I was ready to board the Pere Marquette train for Traverse City that night at eleven o'clock. At about noon Wednesday, shortly after arriving in Traverse City, I had the good fortune to find a taxidriver with enough gas to take me to Leland, in spite of wartime fuel rationing.

Uncle Louis, who lived in Green Bay, Wisconsin, had managed to get aboard a carferry that crossed the lake from Manitowoc to Frankfort, Michigan, where he got a ride with a friend to Leland, arriving just an hour earlier than I. Our relatives made us comfortable while uncle and I occupied ourselves making final arrangements for the burial on South Manitou the next day, August 9.

Thursday dawned cloudy and windy and the lake was too rough for the mailboat to make the trip from Leland to the island. Instead, the South Manitou Coast Guard agreed to pick up our group at Glen Haven with their power cruiser. It had a V-shaped bottom and cut through the waves for a smoother crossing. The funeral cortege drove slowly through the beautiful countryside, arriving at Glen Haven shortly before noon.

It required eight of us to carry the casket, enclosed in a heavy wooden box, along the pier to the cruiser where it was securely lashed in place on top of the cabin. The crossing was fairly rough, but no one got seasick. Our party included a Lutheran minister, the undertaker and his assistant, a cousin, Ernest and his daughter, several friends, Uncle Louis and myself.

We arrived at the island about 1:00 p.m. The dock was teeming

with people and activity. After receiving a warm welcome, we carried the casket to a nearby flat-bed hay-wagon that served as the hearse. All of the island residents were on hand in their Sunday best, including Bertha. She wore a brightly colored dress, dark jacket, and a blue and white coast guard cap. Her face was streaked with white powder and her lips outlined with scarlet lipstick. I was suddenly startled by a farmer's wife who told me that she wanted to buy Uncle John's piano. She would not take no for an answer and persisted until I mentioned probate and the sentiment we attached to uncle's furnishings. She allowed that she would pay for the piano, but not for sentiment.

After some delay, the funeral procession got underway at about three miles per hour. A tractor pulled the wagon, now weighted down with the casket and about a dozen people, including members of the Coast Guard in their dress uniforms. An old, two-wheel trailer was hitched on behind, also loaded with people. Its worn tires did not hold air very well, so we had to stop every little while to pump them up. In the rear, wheezed a couple of ancient Model T Fords and an Overland touring car. Bertha refused to ride on the trailer; she insisted on walking and took a shortcut through the woods. One of the cars stalled on the way, but was coaxed along again, although it smoked like a locomotive. Uncle Louis and I sat on the wagon next to the casket; when we got to the cemetery we were gray with dust.

Bertha was waiting there for us along with the remaining island residents. The heavy cloud cover had given way to a blue sky and the warm, soft sunshine filtered through

puffy, white clouds. It was decided to hold the service in the shade under a big beech tree. The mourners gathered in a circle, listening intently to every word the minister uttered. A gentle breeze stirred the leaves, as if striving to accompany the chorus as they sang, "Abide with Me." The womenfolk dabbed at their tears, and the bronzed, rugged-looking farmers gazed solemnly ahead as the coastguardsmen stood stiffly at attention. It was an unforgettable scene in nature's own Technicolor.

Uncle John was laid to rest amid a mass of flowers brought over on the boat. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," intoned the minister and the service ended. The undertaker then asked if anyone wanted a flower as a memento. In a firm, loud voice, Bertha asked, "Are they for sale?" I hushed her up and gave her a yellow gladiola. "Oh! such a big one," she said.

We retraced our way back to the little settlement near the lighthouse, where the ladies served a lunch of sandwiches, prize-winning apple and lemon cream pies and lemonade. The Coast Guard then returned to Glen Haven with all of the visitors, except Uncle Louis and myself.

Our plan was to hitch a ride to the farm early the next morning, but the old cars performed so unpredictably that uncle and I decided to walk. We were very anxious to see if the farmhouse and the other buildings were secure and in good order. Removing our shoes and socks, we walked about one and a half mile along the beach to the old dock. Looking for an opening in the forest, we headed inland and found a shortcut through the woods uncle remembered using as a boy. I was afraid he might lose the way because



Parlor in new farmhouse showing piano and stove, 1945

all traces of the path had disappeared, but he hurried on without any hesitation and finally said, "Now, in about two minutes you will see the barn." We ambled down a hill, walked through a grove of trees and there, across the field, was the big barn and familiar white farmhouse, as he had predicted. Everything looked the same as always--quiet and peaceful--sheltered by the tall maple trees.

Approaching the house to unlock the back door, we were greeted by several cats and a flock of chickens. Inside, the smell from being closed up tightly for so long was unbearable. We tried to open the windows, but they were nailed shut. Uncle Louis found a hammer and pliers and soon had every window on both floors wide open. We discovered that the pungent odor was coming from a kettle of spoiled spareribs and sauerkraut in the pantry. Uncle held his nose, grabbed the kettle and tossed its contents into the woods.

Meanwhile, I was kept busy chasing out the chickens and cats that came in the open windows looking for food. While cleaning the kitchen, I heard a suspicious noise in the parlor. It was a wise old cat who had jumped in the window and was eating our cookies, supposedly safe in the front room. I dropped the cookies and cat out the way it came in.

My first task was to find Uncle John's cash and important papers. I wondered if he had told us his true hiding places, or later changed them. Thoughts of digging for buried money and ransacking all of the buildings appalled me whenever they came to mind. Tension mounted when Louis came into the parlor with me to search inside the piano for hidden money.

We reasoned that John would not have cared to move such a heavy object everytime he wanted a few dollars and probably hid it behind the lower front panel. It opened easily and revealed a tin can

containing a wallet with nearly all of the currency he had recently withdrawn from an Empire bank. With the money now accounted for, my next job was to find the will and other important documents. I located a small ladder and was about to enter the woodshed, where the papers were supposed to have been hidden, only to be startled by a big black hen that flew out of the door, scolding at the top of her voice. I again entered cautiously and climbed up to the rafters.

The first box I opened contained some empty bottles and a nest of mice. They scampered in every direction when I turned the flashlight on them. Next, under layers of dust and cobwebs, was another large

wooden box covered over with lumber and an old rug. After removing the boards one at a time, I reached down through successive layers of old pillows, feathers caked with dirt, and other litter scattered about by the mice. The heat and odor next to the roof was overpowering as I dug still deeper, feeling around the bottom until my hand brushed against a hard object. It was a metal strongbox bound with a cord, filled with musty papers still in good condition.

I breathed a sigh of relief and took it outside to inspect the contents in daylight. Included were insurance papers, tax receipts, the will and the original three deeds to the farm, handwritten in flowery script on

*Old summer-house and woodshed,
as they appeared in 1945*



thick parchment. The oldest deed, dated November 1, 1864, was authorized by President Abraham Lincoln, the second, dated July 10, 1865, by President Andrew Johnson and the third, dated November 1, 1869, by President Ulysses S. Grant.

There was still much work to be done, so we arose at five o'clock the next morning. After washing in the icy-cold water outside at the pump, Uncle Louis and I each had an orange. Then, while he went looking for some kerosene to help get a fire started in the kitchen stove, I quickly collected some tinder and pieces of pine and had a good hot fire going before he blew the place up. I had to boil the dishes and scour the only two spoons I could locate, before cooking some oatmeal and brewing the coffee. Fresh bread given us the day before, a new oilcloth on the kitchen table, that my mother had sent Uncle John recently, and a vase of wild roses helped us enjoy a hearty breakfast. The warmth from a cup of hot coffee and the crackling fire felt good following a nighttime chill of fifty-five degrees.

After relaxing for awhile, Louis went outside to nail shut the doors on the big barn, the summer house, several buildings in the clearing and in the woods. I busied myself inside, washing an accumulation of greasy dishes and blackened pots and pans. There were scraps of mouldy food to be buried along with old medicine bottles, tincans and the old oilcloth. A battered spittoon, essential because of his "catarrah," work clothes and the bed-clothing on a cot he slept on near the stove in cold weather, were all deposited in a deep hole and covered over with sand. Uncle John, bless his soul, was not what you might call an ideal housekeeper.

By the time I had mopped up the kitchen floor it was eleven o'clock Friday morning. Things now looked first-rate, so I nailed the windows shut and drew the shades, just as Louis appeared and announced that he had nailed up everything except the old outhouse, which he referred to by a more colorful name. Anyone using it did so at his own risk.

The neighbor who promised to pick us up with his broken-down jalopy did not arrive, so after taking a last look around to make certain everything was secure, we set out on foot for the dock. The clean, crisp air renewed our spirits as we picked up the trail out of the woods to the clearing dotted with wild blackberry bushes. Although small in size, the berries are very sweet and melt in one's mouth. We stopped from time to time to eat our fill. At a fork in the road we were joined by two little blonde girls, each with a pail of freshly picked apples. Munching on tart Winesaps, the four of us padded on along a narrow path shrouded by fragrant evergreens, our footsteps muffled by a cushion of leaves and pine needles.

After having lunch with relatives and arranging for the care and disposition of the cats and a few remaining chickens at the farm, we made our way to the pier to await the arrival of the mailboat. I was greeted by the lady, who earlier had wanted to buy the piano, and asked quite unabashedly, if I had found all of John's money. A young neighbor's boy piped up, "I know where he hid it--in the parlor--I saw him go in there for some." I told all within hearing that everything was in order and that his money and papers were exactly where he said they would be found. The prospective piano buyer

suddenly lost all interest in a musical career now that the piano was stripped of its windfall. I also hoped that any potential treasure hunters would be discouraged from digging up the place for buried loot.

We said goodbye, boarded the mailboat and cruised up to North Manitou, tying up for twenty minutes, just long enough to take on a load of cherries. The wind had whipped up quite a sea and the boat pitched and tossed among the whitecaps all the way to Leland. Some of the campers who came across with us became seasick and regretted stuffing themselves with cherries, stacked all around us in open boxes. By standing amidship and holding onto the cabin top, I avoided being thrown from side to side and did not get sick. Uncle Louis, the old Salt, just picked out a comfortable spot and calmly smoked his pipe. We entered Leland harbor three and one-half hours after

leaving South Manitou. Both of us slept soundly that night after all of the buffeting.

The next morning I arranged a ride to Frankfort for Louis and accompanied him as far as Empire, where some of Uncle John's unfinished business was concluded. After visiting with relatives and relating an account of the funeral ceremony, my cousin suggested I walk across the street and ask the well-informed, village switchboard operator if she knew of anyone in town driving to Traverse City. Not only did she know, but gladly phoned the couple she had overheard earlier and arranged with them to take me along. I caught the Chicago-bound train, Saturday at 5:30 p.m. and arrived in the city at eight o'clock Sunday morning, very happy to be home again after a busy, eventful week--an exciting and memorable wartime experience.

*U.S. Coast Guard Station on South Manitou,
closed in 1958*



Chapter XII

The Past Revisited

World War II had ended and along with it, gas rationing. My parents and I were anxious to visit South Manitou again to determine the condition of the property and what action should be taken to preserve and protect the buildings from the elements. My sister, Fay, agreed to come along, do the cooking and assist my mother, now in her late seventies. My father, also in his seventies, was in good health and active enough to keep a rein on twelve-year-old Skip, my sister's boy, making his first trip to the island.

Our 1939 Olds, with its powerful eight-cylinder in-line engine, was loaded to capacity with cartons of food in its roomy trunk; suitcases were placed on a luggage carrier strapped to the Turret-top. Because of a lack of refrigeration on the island, we packed mostly canned food, including evaporated milk for breakfast cereal and coffee. Fresh bread, fruit and perishables would be purchased at a well-stocked grocery store in Leland, just before boarding the mailboat for the island.

Our plan was to make the drive from Chicago to Leland in two days to permit a less hectic trip for our parents. We were happy to leave behind us, the steel mills with their murky haze at the foot of Lake Michigan, and head north on the east

side of the lake through the Berrien County towns, known for their bounteous production of fruit and berries. Continuing northward through Muskegon on route 31, one begins to discern a change in the scenery around Pentwater, giving a slight preview of what is in store farther north.

We stayed overnight at a Ludington hotel and decided to leave early the next morning before breakfast. It proved to be a mistake. The few eating places encountered along the way did not open until much later in the day. They had not yet prepared for the coming tourist boom that was to develop shortly after the war. It was not until we reached Frankfort, on route M22, that we found a little cafe, opened early to serve the carferry workmen and travelers crossing the lake. After being famished for several hours we agreed the breakfast was one of the best ever--it also improved everyone's disposition. On later trips we always managed to have at least one or more meals at the little cafe and fondly remember their delicious homemade berry pies.

The scenic turnout, just north of Frankfort, provided a spectacular view of massive sand dunes and the sparkling waters of Lake Michigan. One could hear the muffled sound of

breakers rolling on the beach stretched out below us for miles. We continued north on M22 where it hugs the shoreline, circles Crystal Lake and crosses the narrows at scenic Glen Lake, arriving at Leland an hour before the mailboat was due to leave for the island. Bread, meat and semi-perishables from the grocery store near the dock, were added to our supply of canned food, then transferred with our luggage from the car to the boat. After parking the car in a local garage we were ready for a smooth ride across the lake to South Manitou.

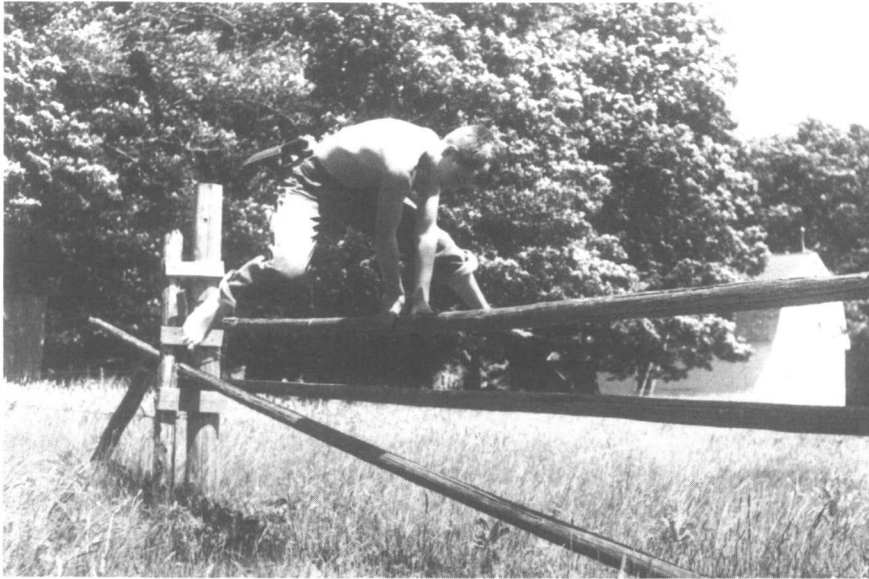
Bertha was the first one to greet us on the island, and cousin George, in his four-cylinder Overland touring car, was on hand to drive us to the farm with all of our supplies. He had to make two trips in his twenty-year-old Overland that performed flawlessly. Its shiny, baked-on-black finish was still in good condition; lack of four-wheel brakes posed no problem on the unpaved roads. Panic stops were a rarity with only two or three other cars in running condition on the entire island.

Our first concern was to check the water supply. Uncle John had lowered a pipe and strainer down the open well that had provided most of the farm's drinking water for almost a century. Grandfather and his sons originally dug the sixty-foot shaft by hand, shoring up the walls with hand-hewn timbers. To get an adequate supply of water, uncle drove the pipe about fifteen feet deeper into the water-bearing gravel and filled in the open well with sand. A tall hand pump on a wooden platform now provided plenty of clear, very cold water. It was delicious and refreshing and made wonderful coffee, but it was also

hard; when washing, the water went one way and the soap the other.

After pumping out a couple of buckets to clear the pipe, we turned our attention to the house, unoccupied since John's death a year earlier. Faced with a mountain of supplies in an unfamiliar setting, and with five of us trooping in and out looking for a place to store things, it was a wonder that we could locate anything. A semblance of order began to emerge after we carried our luggage and personal items upstairs to the three bedrooms. The cartons of canned food were stored in the stormhouse, and a search for a cool spot to store the perishables ended, when we decided to lower those supplies into a deep potato pit near the edge of the forest. Having no electricity for refrigeration and no ice on the island, the covered pit, with a temperature of about fifty degrees at the bottom was the answer.

There were only a few window screens, but we had brought some mosquito netting along and soon had plenty of fresh air circulating throughout the house. Our attempts to get organized were delayed by the discovery of mouse traces in the pantry and elsewhere. Any doubt that they were fresh was dispelled when a mouse ran across the kitchen floor into the parlor, to the consternation of my mother and sister. Our attempts to maneuver it outside with a broom failed and it took refuge behind the piano. Skip, who was outside target practicing with his air rifle, came running in to see what the commotion was all about. "Move the piano, Gramps," he said, as he aimed his rifle, "I'll fix him." The piano was moved and Skip's aim was true; calm was restored.



Skip, leaping over pasture gate of poles.

Rodents became a problem. With no cats and few predators around to hold them in check, chipmunks and mice multiplied rapidly. The rough, unfinished lumber, sawed on the premises and used for framework when the farmhouse was built, provided any number of openings for mice to explore. No time was lost in setting traps for the intruders.

We were reminded of a story told by Bertha, about a visitor spending the night, who experienced some discomfort with her false teeth. Not wishing to get up in the dark and disturb anyone, she wrapped the upper plate in her handkerchief and placed it on the floor beside the bed. In the morning, when she reached for her teeth, they were gone. Not yet fully awake, she got up, looked all around, but there was no trace of them. By that time others were awake and heard her muttering about a mouse running off with her teeth. In disbelief, they looked everywhere and finally discovered the plate wedged in a hole behind a

dresser, where the mouse had dragged it. If the opening had been slightly larger, her teeth would have slipped in and disappeared forever. It was clear why Uncle John always kept a few cats around to discourage the unwelcome visitors.

While the two women worked to bring order in the farmhouse, my father and I made the rounds outside, inspecting a collection of barns and other structures that made up our miniature village. There were storage sheds of several kinds and all needed roof repairs, especially the woodshed near the house, containing a plentiful supply of maple and pine firewood. Another shed in the woods needing attention, stacked high with wood shingles for the west section of the barn, enticed us inside with its lingering cedar aroma.

An eighty-year old icehouse, shaded by the dense maple forest, was constructed of logs that had been squared off with a hand axe. Square, four-inch holes were cut in

the logs for ventilation at shoulder-high intervals. It looked like a primitive blockhouse, with openings for muskets to ward off attacks by marauding outlaws. Young visitors preferred their own fantasy of besieged pioneers inside the fortress, fighting off a band of Indians.

The smaller of the two barns in the pasture, originally used to shelter pigs, had been reshingled. Its hand-hewn gutter, hollowed out of a long, straight log many years ago, still channelled water to a rain barrel. The ground level section was constructed of horizontal, hand-hewn timbers about a foot square, to withstand any possible abuse from full-grown hogs. An upper floor, needed for storage, contained handcrafted wood rakes, pitchforks, and a heavy wooden yoke for the oxen that grandfather originally used to clear the land of stumps and boulders. This solid, old barn required only a few repairs.

Skip had coaxed my father to explore a newly discovered forest trail, so I made my way alone across the pasture to the farm's largest structure. Looming before me, several stories high, the huge, weatherbeaten barn, almost a century old, awakened decades of memories and a feeling of having returned to the world of my childhood. Entering one of the many doors, I had the ghostly feeling that I was coming back to haunt a former hideaway. Even the fragrance of dried hay and lingering hint of manure was still there. Only missing was the restless stirring of the farm animals, no longer in their stalls. But there was also a feeling of security, being surrounded by the immense beams and stout wooden walls, as well as admiration for my grandfather and the men who helped him build it.

Hand-hewn structural beams showed the marks of the broadaxe used to shape them from rough logs.

*Original nineteenth-century barn, 1945 photo.
Later struck by lightning and destroyed.*



The massive framing sections, assembled on the ground, were raised by brute strength with long pointed poles, sometimes being coaxed aloft and steadied with a pulley suspended from a tripod of towering masts. Cross members and supports were mated at the mortised joints, formed with axe and chisel, and locked in place by wooden pegs, driven in holes bored with hand augers. As a youth I often climbed up the ladders to the highest loft and was puzzled to see the timbers joined by wooden pegs instead of spikes, not available until years after the barn was built. I was warned to limit my exploration to ground level, but who could resist the thrill of climbing skyward and jumping into a deep cushion of sweet-smelling hay. An unexpected plunge only added to the excitement. Whoever was assigned the heavenly task of protecting adventurous boys must worked overtime watching over me.

My reverie was abruptly ended by someone calling my name--it was my nephew with the other members of the family, eager to roam through the barn's cavernous interior. Among a collection of handmade wooden rakes, pitchforks and other common farm tools, was an old flail. My mother explained how her parents used it to thresh grain out of the husks on the hard, flat surface underfoot. This area was now crowded with horse-drawn buggies, sleighs and a threshing machine that was operated by means of a wide, flat belt, traveling around pulleys, powered by a steam engine. A collection of saddles and harnesses were hung, ready for use, near the horse stalls. Plows and other implements for tilling the soil were lined up in another area. A leanto at

the south wall of the barn provided shade for the animals. The roof sloped, so that runoff water for the livestock collected in a trough, hollowed out of a huge, eighteen-inch-square log. On the west side of the barn, wide, double-doors were large enough to admit a horse and wagon. Bulky items were stored there, including Uncle John's sixteen-foot rowboat.

When I last saw it years earlier, it was tied up on the shore of the island's little Lake Florence. Uncle had offered to take my companion, George, and me fishing for something larger than perch. George's father had loaned him his favorite fishing rod and reel, with the usual admonition to handle it carefully. We rowed out to a likely spot and anchored, but the fish were not biting and we met with no better luck in deeper water. Discouraged by the lack of activity, George propped his pole against the side of the boat while watching my float bob. However, the motion was not caused by a nibble, but by the drifting boat. As he returned his attention to his pole, he saw it disappear over the side of the boat into deep water. It was gone before he could snatch it. The hook had snagged on the bottom and the line could not play out with the reel in locked position.

Uncle was the first to react and tried to reach for the line with an oar, but it was too late. Rowing a few yards to some tall reeds, he tied several in a knot to mark the spot. He figured there was a slim chance of retrieving the fishing rod with his grappling hook. George was very dejected and dreaded the thought of telling his father about the loss of the expensive rod and jeweled reel.

Uncle had some field work the next



Hand-hewn water trough for livestock.

morning, so he gave the grappling hook to George and to me and we returned to the little lake. We found the knotted reeds, threw the hook at the end of a long rope into the water and attempted to row back and forth near the spot where the rod sank. But the grappling hook acted like an anchor and we could not make any headway rowing, try as we might. Anchoring the boat, throwing out the hook and pulling it in worked better. We persevered for awhile, but without any luck.

It was nearing lunch time and we were getting hungry and discouraged. As I was pulling it in for what was to be the last time, I felt the hook grab onto something solid. However, as the object neared the surface I saw that it was just another waterlogged

branch. I grabbed it and was about to throw it away, when we noticed a short length of tangled fishline. Pulling in the line carefully, the pole finally came into view, none the worse for having been submerged overnight. Oddly enough, the locked reel that resulted in the pole being jerked overboard, also enabled us to pull it up from the bottom, otherwise, we might have ended up with only a fishline.

Suspending bittersweet memories and returning to the task at hand, my father and I agreed that the old barn was in pretty fair shape, except for the shingles on the west annex, for which replacements were on hand. We missed seeing the old corncrib, a slotted stronghold chock-full of air-dried corn for the livestock. It had

been erected on posts, a couple of feet above the ground, with inverted pie tins nailed in place halfway, to prevent rodents from gorging themselves. Also gone, was the old, pungent-smelling smokehouse with its blackened, charred-wood interior. Hams and sausages were hung up high to obtain the maximum preservative benefit from the smoke. Uncle tore it down after disposing of his livestock.

The summer house, built near the turn of the century by grandfather for his visiting daughters and their families, was now used solely for storage. The roof needed attention and other outside areas required weatherproofing. The new

farmhouse, built about 1920, was in good shape, but the wood shingles, covered with moss, would have to be removed and replaced with asphalt base material. Also, the outside of the house was about due for repainting. Some of the nearby maple trees were spreading their branches outward and if left untouched would eventually envelope part of the house. Excessive shade already fostered dampness and the formation of moss. If the wind blew any of the hardwood giants onto the farmhouse, they would have crushed it like a matchbox. The closest maple tree had a trunk diameter of almost three feet, and overwhelmed its neighbors in competition for sunlight, with

Authors' mother and sister, Fay, among the wild roses, 1945





Single wild rosebush

forty-foot long branches. To counter the encroaching forest, about a half-dozen trees were marked for the axe and hand saw. The power chainsaw was not yet available.

Bertha was a frequent visitor and usually brought us some berries or other fruit she picked along the way. On one such visit, Skip, who was pitching horseshoes, persuaded her to join him. If one of them threw a ringer, she clapped her hands, stomped her foot and bubbled over with uninhibited delight. She was very fond of music and was fascinated when my sister played Uncle John's old violin for her. I accompanied Fay on the aging piano that held its tune quite well over the years. The violin, however, did not withstand the temperature extremes in the often, unheated farmhouse, and we decided to bring it back to Chicago for restoration.

The crackling wood fire in the kitchen cookstove radiated a lot of heat. It had to be kindled for each meal and required about thirty minutes to bring cold water to a boil. In summer the kitchen became very

warm until the heat slowly dissipated through the open windows and doors. My mother and sister complained that the stove had a weak draft, even with the dampers wide open. I noticed the sparse plume of smoke from the chimney and decided to check it when I inspected the lightning rods installed along the roof's peak.

My father helped me get the heavy ladder uncle had fashioned from two lean trees, with rough rungs nailed in place for steps. Unfortunately, it did not quite reach the upper section of the gambrel roof. I had to lasso the chimney and pull on the rope as I crept toward the ridge to avoid sliding off of the slippery, moss-covered surface. The reason for the poor draft was apparent the moment I looked down the chimney. A pair of chimney swifts had built a nest and raised their brood on a narrow ledge, about two feet from the top. After the abandoned nest was removed the draft problem ceased. To forestall a repetition, I measured the chimney and had a protective metal cover made for it.

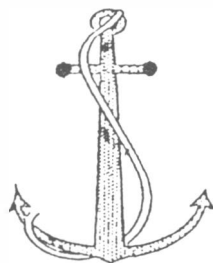
A wide variety of songbirds offered their cheerful melodies to help brighten our day. Some preferred the solitude of the forest, like the wood thrush with its flute-like, haunting song. Lively goldfinches, or wild canaries as the children called them, twittered as they darted around the meadow on their roller-coaster flights. They liked to rest on the pump handle and seemed to sing their thanks for the pan of water we placed for them under the dripping spout. Barn swallows, recognized by their deeply-forked tails, entertained us with graceful aerial maneuvers. They felt secure in their cup-like earth and grass nests, fastened to the side of the rough joists over the horse stalls, and would not fly away when we walked by only a foot or so below them. Whip-poor-wills often filled the night air with rhythmic, mysterious calls that revealed their covert presence. The familiar meadowlark's whistle and all of the other happy sounds my mother remembered hearing as a child still filled the air.

A profusion of snow-white daisies with bright-yellow centers, blackeyed susans, Queen Anne's lace, delicate, pink wild-roses and splashes of blue larkspur completed the meadow's tapestry, mingling the delicate

fragrance of wild flowers with the pleasant smell of moist earth.

Brilliantly colored, fluttering Monarch butterflies dipped and swayed lazily about the meadow. They found their way across the continent to this pinpoint of land, probably drawn by a homing instinct and their attraction to the milkweed plants that thrive here. Years later, we learned that the late generation raised here, will navigate, unerringly, thousands of miles to winter quarters, deep inside a forest wilderness in Mexico. As summer draws to a close, they may be seen in the midwest, flying one by one, in a southwesterly direction to escape winter's death sentence. So fragile looking, as they flutter by on gossamer wings, it seems that a gust of wind might crash them to the ground. But these black, orange and gold creatures are flying marvels, and somehow find their way thousands of miles to a place they have never seen.

These were the visions we brought back home with us, along with a firm resolve to reverse the decline uncovered by our inspection. The farm now rested in the hands of a third generation. We were determined to do our utmost to protect and restore our legacy.



Chapter XIII

Tragic Fire and a Progress Report

Faced with deteriorating buildings that aged Uncle John was no longer able to maintain, our most urgent task was to protect them from the ravages of the weather. Already, one could see abandoned farmhouses being beaten to the ground, losing their battle with the elements. Windows broken, doors off their hinges, roaming livestock defiling the once spotless rooms, that in times past echoed with the voices of children and their industrious parents.

Arrangements were made to have all of the buildings reroofed. However, as the workmen were about to start on the big barn, nature intervened. Lightning rods in good condition had afforded protection for many years, until a bolt from a late summer thunderstorm, singled out the tallest structure in the pasture and set it ablaze. The dry wood burned fiercely and lit up the sky so brightly the inferno could be seen across the lake from the mainland. The grand old barn burned to the ground with all of its treasures--nothing was saved.

Nevertheless, work proceeded on the other buildings. A new kitchen stormhouse with windows replaced the old dark shed, and a sturdy new linoleum over the rough floorboards helped to brighten the area. After the moss-covered shingles on the farmhouse roof were removed,

special widths of roughcut lumber had to be sawed to fit into the spaces between the original roof boards, to provide a solid base for the new, blue, asphalt shingles.

We were pleased with the improved appearance of the farmhouse, but were dismayed to discover that the pounding on the roof had caused sections of the bedroom plaster to break loose and blanket the beds and carpets with debris. As we prepared to cleanup the mess without the benefit of a vacuum cleaner, it was obvious that wallboard would be needed to secure the rest of the plaster. The rag carpets, laboriously handmade years earlier by our grandmother, had to be rolled up along with the rubble and grit and dropped out of the windows. Only the lake provided enough space to wash the heavy carpets. To get there we had to pile one or two at a time on Myron's bicycle, and walk two abreast while pushing it the mile or so to the old dock. Each carpet was tied to a piling where the action of the waves gave it a thorough cleaning. It was also an opportunity for us to bathe in the cold harbor water. The younger ones did not seem to mind the temperature, diving and swimming with abandon, but my limbs became numb and turned pink if I splashed around in it too long. It was stimulating, but I preferred to bathe



Twenty-year-old Overland touring-car, ran good in 1947.

in a washtub full of water, warmed by letting it stand for awhile in the hot sun.

The dripping wet carpets were much too heavy to carry back, so we laid them out on the stony beach to partially dry until they were light enough to haul back to the farm, where they could be spread on the grass in the sun. We were kept busy chasing a multitude of grasshoppers off the carpets before relaying them in the bedrooms. The upstairs smelled just like Lake Michigan for several days.

Other unexpected problems were encountered, as when a large branch or tree toppled over and blocked the trail that wound through the woods to the farmhouse. One could walk around the barrier, but it was impossible to drive through the saplings and thick underbrush. We had to get grandfather's old, two-man crosscut saw, that had a handle at each end of a long course blade, and cut the tree into several sections so they could be rolled out of the way.

What could have been our most serious problem, was the time we discovered we had no drinking water. It had seemed that cold, sparkling water would keep gushing out of the pump spout forever. No one gave any thought to the well failing. But here was a hot July day--we were extremely thirsty--and not a drop of water to drink. Fortunately, a neighbor who picked up my nephew Skip and me at the dock, and drove us with our supplies to the farm, had not left yet. Hurriedly gathering up a half-dozen bottles and jugs, we drove with him to the schoolhouse pump and filled them with enough water to last until the next morning.

Because we thought we heard water trickling under the well platform when working the pump handle, we decided to remove some of the boards and explore the space underneath. As Skip started pumping, water began to flow out of a foot long crack in the pipe that brought it to the surface. A closer look revealed two small holes in the

pipe, closed off with wooden plugs. Uncle John apparently removed the plugs in winter, so that any water left in the pipe would trickle out below the frostline, yet allow a flow to the spout. With the plugs in place the water froze and the pipe split.

I sealed the crack with first-aid tape, the only material available and wrapped friction tape around the pipe to hold it in place. This makeshift repair enabled us to get water again and lasted until the split pipe could be replaced on my next trip. At the same time, I wanted to check the condition of the wooden pump rod, so with my nephew's help, pulled it up to the surface. We laid the seventy-five-foot-long rod, made in several sections of one and a quarter-inch-square ash, on the grass for a close look. It was in fair condition, even after being immersed in water for at least twenty-five years. To avoid future problems, I decided to replace the old wood with metal rods the next year, also the leather gasket at the bottom of the well. We

were rewarded with clearer water and the absence of slivers floating on the surface.

For awhile, every visit to the island produced its share of unexpected repair jobs. Some of the handmade windows that had been salvaged from the old farmhouse when uncle tore it down in the nineteen-twenties, and reused in his new home, had begun to decay. To replace them it was necessary to modify standard size windows to fit the non-standard sash. This task was done in the city. I had to bring several new windows with me on each trip to the island until all of the old ones were replaced. A sturdy wooden extension ladder shipped to the farm was indispensable when working on the upper portion of the house.

The year after finding a birdnest in the chimney, I brought along a metal hood for it, with a small canopy on top to keep the birds out and to shed heavy rain, but the chimney swifts were not easily discouraged. They persisted in making a nest in the

Autos and boxcars ready to be loaded onto carferry at Ludington



same place, even though the brick ledge was now a good three feet below the canopy, and they had to enter through a section of six-inch diameter pipe at the top of the hood. Adding some stiff metal screening to the opening finally eliminated the problem of a smoke-filled kitchen.

A strong draft was needed to get a fire going in the ancient cookstove. Starting with a cold stove required about thirty minutes to bring water to a boil. It seemed much longer when standing around, impatiently waiting for a warm meal. But once the stove was hot the handy flattop surface provided a wide range of heat. Nevertheless, cooking three meals a day not only consumed a lot of time, but during the summer, made the kitchen uncomfortably warm.

Years earlier, uncle had painted the kitchen a shade of tan that darkened to a depressing brown. We all agreed that a cream color was more suitable and would lighten the room perceptibly. To surprise my family, I brought some paint and brushes with me on my next trip--flat white for the first coat and glossy, cream enamel for the final shade.

Plastering holes and gashes in the walls, especially where uncle miscalculated when he aimed an armful of firewood at the fuelbox, took an entire day. The flat white paint was easy to apply and it appeared as though another day of painting would see the job completed, but I did not anticipate the difficulty I was to have using enamel. It had a thick molasses-like consistency and the heat from the stove made it almost impossible to brush on evenly. It would have taken several days to get some thinner, so I struggled on for three days before finishing the

kitchen. Easy-to-use paint formulations and rollers were not yet available.

That same year, a tree fell on the ancient outhouse scheduled for future demolition. The blow almost tipped it over and held it at such a precarious angle that it could not be used, in spite of our frenzied efforts. What to do? In rummaging through the summer-house, our neighbor, Floyd, who came along to help with my projects, found an old wooden egg crate. After removing the top and bottom sections, he placed it over a hole dug in a spot partially shielded by some bushes. One of the enameled toilet seats for use in a newly-planned outhouse fit snugly on top of the egg crate, thus ending our disposal problem. But after a cool fifty-degree night, the high gloss seat felt as cold as ice to flesh not often exposed. Also, we had not planned on rain interfering with nature's call. That miscalculation was evident one rainy morning when Floyd had no choice, but to seek immediate relief and make a dash for it. When I glanced out of the window in his direction, he was sitting there in a downpour, holding an umbrella he had grabbed on the run. It was a ludicrous sight and I only regret that I did not snap a picture for posterity. A new outhouse was given top priority and our island carpenter had it erected in time for our next visit.

One of our important projects was to place a marker on Uncle John's grave. After selecting a suitable stone and having it engraved in the city, my nephew, Skip, and husky friend, Floyd, offered to help me lug the heavy gravestone to the island and cement it in place. We encircled it with thick rope and managed to hoist it onto the floor of my Olds, along



Skip and Floyd at Uncle John's grave

with a bag of cement.

At that time the Pere Marquette Railway, and later, the Chesapeake and Ohio, operated a carferry service between Milwaukee, Wis. and Ludington, Mich. The shortcut eliminated the long drive around the foot of Lake Michigan and provided a pleasant seven-hour excursion across the lake. After a leisurely drive to Milwaukee from Chicago, we boarded the huge boat and watched as thirty-two freight cars were guided into the ship's cavernous hold containing four pairs of parallel tracks. To prevent the ship from tipping dangerously, the two center tracks were initially filled with cars and then the outer ones. It was a noisy procedure and the moving and banging reverberated throughout the all-steel vessel. Attendants then drove the passengers' cars aboard, parking some in the hold and others up a ramp to a reinforced after-deck.

Shortly before departure, it was our custom to gather at the bow to watch the activity below as the ship got

underway. A startled newcomer's reaction to the sudden, deafening blast of the ship's horn, aimed in our direction, always prompted some hearty chuckles.

The food, graciously served in the dining salon was good, and the college students, working aboard as waiters during summer vacation, were polite and solicitous. After a fair night's sleep in our stateroom, we were awakened early by the noise of freight cars being pulled off at Ludington. If one happened to doze off, there was a knock on the door with a warning that the maid was about to enter to change the linens.

We had breakfast aboard in order to get an early start for the drive from Ludington to Leland in time to catch the 10 a.m. mailboat for South Manitou. After the boys did some last minute grocery shopping and helped to transfer our supplies and the gravestone from the dock to the boat, I parked the car at a local garage.

Following a routine crossing to the island, we hitched a ride with a

farmer driving a contraption, patched together from what was once a 1920 touring car, reincarnated as a flatbed truck. The radiator was salvaged from another wreck, and the motor without a hood to shield it, was firing away with a carburetor and miscellaneous parts salvaged from other derelicts. There was no top or windshield, the rear fenders were missing and so were the seats, except for the driver's side, identifiable only by the bare coil springs. But the patchwork truck rattled along, kicking up a cloud of powdery sand. After dropping off the stone and cement at the cemetery, we arrived at the farmhouse, covered with dust.

To help cushion the bumpy ride, I sat on an old canvas tarp. It seemed only a bit damp, but the sponge-like material left a wet ring on the seat of my pants that became an unsightly stain. The slacks shrank badly after being washed and ironed with grandmother's old, black flatiron, heated on the cookstove. Although

about four inches too short, I had to wear them back to the city by pulling the waist down and keeping my jacket tightly buttoned. The boys thought it was hilarious. I had a couple extra denim work jeans with me, but they were not worn for dress in those days.

The next morning we rounded up a shovel, a trowel and a tub in which to mix the cement. There was plenty of sand and gravel at the cemetery, but no water, so we filled a heavy, war-surplus blitzcan at the pump and steadied it on the bicycle as we pushed it to the gravesite. The boys dug the hole for a foundation, while I added water to the cement mix in the tub. Large rocks were left in place at the bottom of the hole, and the cement poured inside a wood frame, to keep the top few inches in place until it hardened. The gravestone was set into position just as we heard someone playing a tune on a harmonica. It was Bertha. She had walked almost three miles to see the marker, swinging a hambone she said

Bertha, with Skip and Floyd, in 1947





Bertha playing harmonica

we could use to make soup, all the while blowing tunes on a plastic mouth organ she had found on the beach. Bertha liked the gravestone and remarked that a similar one on her final resting place would be just fine.

The conversation led to her telling us that not all of the island's deceased had been buried in the cemetery. We knew that grandfather was buried in his beloved orchard. Uncle Louis had placed a marker on the grave, and we regularly pulled weeds and chopped down maple saplings inside the protective picket fence. Now and then we stumbled across rocks elsewhere, with crude, undecipherable markings, and asked Bertha about them. She mentioned several sites--one containing a baby she thought was buried near the edge of our maple forest. Years earlier, when my nephew and I were digging for bait in the woods behind the old summer-house, we unearthed what looked like a leg bone similar to a human tibia. At the time I dismissed the thought, but the doubt remained until I questioned Bertha about it. She said, "Oh yes, there was an Indian buried there long ago called Mr. Bauer." The area is completely

overgrown now and in no danger of being disturbed.

She then told us about a shallow pit in the woods where she hid some wild blackberry preserves, canned especially for us. They were concealed in an old well shaft that had been filled to about four feet below the surface. We found several jars of fruit preserves in the cool sand, but decided to reboil the contents before using it. The berries were sweet and delicious. However, we buried the hambone she wanted to share with us--the meat on it had started to turn black.

By covering the well opening with boards and spreading a layer of leaves over them, we discovered that the shaft could serve as our cooler. A large, tightly-covered aluminum cooking-pot was used to hold perishables; other packaged food requiring a cool environment was placed on a bottom shelf. The temperature in the shaft, shielded from the sun by the thick maple forest, was cold enough to keep our food from spoiling. There were no problems with insects or animals, and it was much easier to reach our supplies than at the deep potato pit we had been using.

For several years, I thought of getting a light truck for the farm. Walking or riding the bicycle to the dock for the mail took a lot of time, and trying to balance a heavy box of supplies while pedaling on the sandy trail was precarious. One could not always depend on help from a neighbor, or that one of the island rustmobiles would be running when needed. Skip usually rode the bicycle the three miles or so to the dock for our mail, but if a large item was expected, I had to leave my work and go with him. To save time, he would ride the bike about one-half mile, then park it at the side of the road and start walking. When I reached the bicycle, I would ride about a half-mile past Skip, park the bike and resume walking. The road was too rough for both of us to ride the bicycle at the same time, so alternating saved time and energy.

On one occasion when Skip rode alone for the mail, two mattresses I had ordered, arrived ahead of time. He was trying to haul them over to Bertha's porch when a coastguardman saw him struggling and gave him, the mattresses and bike a lift to the farm in their Jeep, even though such a favor was not customarily allowed. I was thankful for their help, and the experience strengthened my resolve to get a Jeep for the farm--but where to keep it?

Uncle John had been using the summer-house to store various tools, hardware and small machinery. It seemed likely that if the bulky items were removed from the front room and the doorway enlarged, there might be enough space for a small car. Skip and Floyd helped move several barrels of nails, a reel of barbed wire, a cider press, corn-

husker, grinding wheel, paraphernalia for making maple syrup, and a copper still, plus an assortment of crocks, bottles and jugs. The still was used to make small amounts of medicinal whiskey that packed a considerable wallop. After a few doses of medicine, one could feel no pain. There was a confusing array of tins, pans and boxes of nails, bolts, nuts and a nondescript collection of hardware--probably remnants of harnesses and the old farm machinery that went up in flames when the barn burned down. It seemed that nothing was ever thrown away.

The walls were covered with a dark, formal-patterned wallpaper and decorated with some early 1900 calendars from my father's store. Hanging on nails were castoff work-clothes, the old grappling hook, a machete and a motley assortment of hand tools. It was an unlikely place to use as a garage, but it was the only available space. After determining that the floor was strong enough to support the weight of a car, the island carpenter agreed to make the alterations and to construct a ramp outside of an enlarged, double-door entrance.

In this remote community, where one is largely dependent on others for help, I was fortunate to have the assistance of the island's last remaining carpenter and handyman. Also, my nephews, especially Skip and Walter, and our neighbor, Floyd, were always ready and anxious to lend a hand when needed. Their help and the encouragement from Myron and other family members, helped to nurture and sustain our desire to reverse the deterioration that originally confronted us.

Chapter XIV

Louise's Final Island Visit

The almost new, 1949 Jeep was covered with dust, the tires needed air and the battery a recharge, but there was hardly a blemish on the classic, dark-green body and less than two-thousand miles on the odometer. It was just what I needed for the island farm. No time was lost in coming to terms with the owners, a retired city couple, who decided they wanted to travel in more comfort than the four-wheel-drive vehicle offered. After a thorough inspection, lubrication and fresh anti-freeze, our expert gas-station mechanic pronounced it in mint condition.

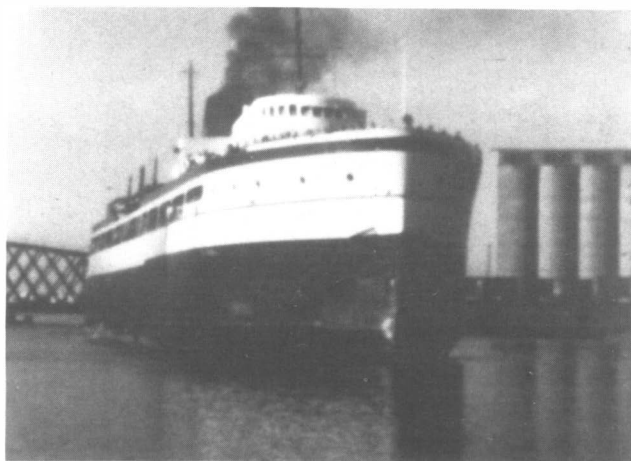
It was a fun-car to drive and a pleasure demonstrating its capability to family and friends--no potential flaws developed during the workout. The Jeep was now ready for my nephew, Skip, to transport up north. He drove it to the carferry in Milwaukee for the regular cruise to Ludington, and for the remaining distance to Leland. A friend, driving his own car, accompanied Skip and later brought him back to the city.

I had arranged earlier, with Captain Tracy, operator of his sturdy, forty-odd-foot mailboat, the *Smiling Thru*, to take the Jeep from Leland to South Manitou. He took charge at the Fishtown dock and crossed the lake on a calm June day, with it lashed in

place on the boat's afterdeck. Our island carpenter kept it in his barn until our arrival the following month.

My mother, now eighty-three years old, had often remarked that she would like to make just one more trip to the island where she was born and grew to girlhood. I felt guilty each time I made the trip up north, but hesitated to take her on the rather arduous journey. Also, there was no way to get her quickly to the Coast Guard Station for help in the event of a medical emergency. Now, with the Jeep at the farm, that worry was erased. Because of reports that the station might soon be closed, I decided to bring her along on the next trip during the summer of 1951. My sister, Fay, and her husband, Bert, agreed to accompany us and help where needed. Their son, Skip, was now experienced enough to be left in charge of their hardware store in Racine, Wisconsin.

Early summer seemed to offer a good chance to avoid a stormy lake crossing, and that period fit in nicely with our vacation schedules. Storms lose some of their intensity in a builtup city, but in the wilderness, even a moderate squall can provide an unforgettable encounter. That is especially true of the island, exposed as it is to storms that sweep unimpeded across a great expanse of



Carferry nearing Milwaukee wharf

water. With no obstructions blocking one's view, the developing thunderstorm may be seen moving closer through a veil of rain, its black clouds spilling over as it approaches the island.

Suddenly, a drumroll of thunder, reverberating between clouds and earth, grows louder and constant, with blinding flashes of lightning stretching their tentacles toward the ground. The wind velocity increases and drives drenching rain in gusts that envelope everything in the storm's path. As though reluctant to leave, the growling thunder echoes back and forth across the lake, growing fainter as the storm recedes in the distance. Then, as it has for eons, nature tires of wreaking its fury on the land and cooler, incredibly clean-smelling air is restored. The parting clouds encourage the sun to emerge again and quiet returns, broken only by the renewed chorus of birds as they venture out of their hidden nooks.

Our vacation was planned carefully, with an adequate supply of nutritious food, including newly available powdered milk and dehydrated potatoes. They were easier to pack

and carry, and the potatoes required much less time to prepare. The long wait for the woodfire to buildup enough heat to cook our meals on the kitchen range was eliminated, by the addition of a three-burner, kerosene cookstove. My sister brought along a pyramid-shaped toaster that could toast up to four slices of bread at a time. No automatic shutoff, but it was a big improvement over toasting a slice of bread on the end of a fork held directly over an open flame.

The sun was shining and the lake was calm as we left Milwaukee behind us on the cruise to Ludington. The drive to Leland was pleasant and mother withstood the break in her routine very well. Pulling up at the dock to prepare for the boatride to South Manitou, we congratulated ourselves for having missed a storm over the northern part of the state.

The lake was a bit choppy and the sky overcast, but there were no whitecaps in sight. I told Captain Tracy, that because of my mother's heart condition, we would delay our crossing if he believed that the lake was too rough. It appeared that the choppy sea presented no problem, so

we decided to go across, with him at the helm of the *Smiling Thru*. He planned to go to North Manitou first, drop off some supplies, and then head for the south island.

The skipper set a northwesterly course and we made good time while in the lee of the mainland. Meanwhile, the northeasterly breeze had grown much stronger, and as we entered the deeper channel, waves it kicked up on our starboard side caused the boat to rock erratically. This was Bert's first trip to the island; he stood on the afterdeck, holding onto the cabin, while trying to counter the roll of the boat. Fay and I sat in the cabin with our mother who was ordinarily a good sailor and rarely got seasick. We tried sitting in different areas, but there was little we could do to minimize the boat's irregular lurching motion, rapidly becoming more severe.

Then, as we approached the center of the deep channel, the waves,

spawned by a rapidly developing nor'easter, blanketed us with bursts of white foam. At the helm, Captain Tracy, peering through the haze, concerned about the rough sea, decided to nose the boat around to port and head for the safety of South Manitou's harbor. There was no turning back--it was too late.

The growing tempest, born farther north, was now pounding the stern with immense swells, increasing in size and momentum, alternately lifting us skyward and then plunging us into a trough, like a nautical roller-coaster. At the crest, foaming whitecaps were everywhere in sight and the lighthouse appeared as a white speck on the horizon, never seeming to grow any larger. A moments pause at the top, then a sickening slide into a swirling, blue-green hollow, until we hit what seemed like a solid bottom, to be deluged with a flood of frothing, green water that threatened to

Mailboat, Smiling Thru, at Leland Fishtown dock, 1951





Jeep at farmhouse, 1951

smash the cabin windows.

Many aboard became wretchedly seasick as the *Smiling Thru* lurched on like a hunted animal trying to escape torment. The captain abandoned any thought of dropping off supplies at the crib. If the struggling motor had faltered, the pounding surf could have dashed us against the massive, concrete crib-base with enough force to reduce the boat to firewood. There was a look of concern on everyone's face, but it was more of resignation than panic. We could do little to ease our ordeal except to prop ourselves in a dry spot and try to keep from being tossed about. Nevertheless, we were confident that the captain would win the battle with the rampaging lake and bring us safely into port.

Although Fay was holding up well under the constant pounding, my mother was weakening, and I prayed that we would find relief from the giant waves that threatened to breach the boat at the stern. Noticing that the skipper had altered our course again, my suspicion that our ordeal was not about to end, was reinforced by a report that waves were washing completely over the coastguard dock, at the southern portion of the harbor where the mailboat normally ties up. Only an exceedingly strong storm out of the northeast can create and channel such massive waves into that area.

Eventually, we pulled into the lee of Gull Point, a spit of sand extending into the lake, breaking the force of the waves. Mercifully, the intense

rocking of the boat gradually subsided as captain Tracy guided the mailboat close to shore and dropped anchor. The Coast Guard had anticipated our predicament and was there to meet us with a surfboat, ready to ferry the passengers to shore. The ladies were first helped over the side into the smaller craft and rowed to shore, followed by the men, our provisions and supplies, and finally, Bert and myself. It was the first time in almost a half-century that I was aboard a mailboat, unable to land at a dock because of the weather. It seemed ironic that after all of our careful planning, the lake trip had turned into such a harrowing experience and a devil's baptism for Bert on his first excursion to the island.

The Jeep had been parked on the beach, about a quarter-mile from the road that ends near the ruins of the old dock. My mother was seated comfortably in the cab and Fay in the back to steady the luggage. I returned a little later for Bert and our remaining supplies. The Jeep moved right along on the beach where the wet sand was packed down solidly. It was ideally suited for the primitive island trails, but without four-wheel-drive and the lug-tread tires, it would have been stalled in the loose sand between the beach and the gravel road to the farm.

Everything was in order at the farmhouse, and a few tries at the pump brought water flowing out of the spout. Fay made some hot tea, and mother rested for awhile on the cot. After our evening meal and a good night's sleep, we were ready to forget our rough ride.

I was anxious to guide the others around the farm and to point out the improvements that were made

since their last visit. Our mother missed seeing the old, big barn that was struck by lightning and had burned down. She walked silently across the meadow to the spot where it had been erected by her father when she was just a little girl. Only ashes and a few twisted pieces of metal were all that remained of the massive structure.

Our spirits rose as we made the rounds of the various storage sheds, each protected now from water damage, with a new, red asphalt-base roof, and finally, the remaining barn that uncle had earlier reroofed with cedar shingles. I usually carried a hammer and nails with me when roaming among these wooden structures. Old, square-cut, iron nails that held the gray, weathered siding in place often worked loose and fell out. I found a great deal of satisfaction hammering the boards back in place with new, modern, steel nails.

Our last stop was at the timeworn summer-house, now being used for storage, with the former parlor as a garage for the Jeep. Our mother was especially interested in their Chicago-store calendars that she sent to the island around 1900, still hanging on the papered walls. There were several small, tin fruit-pails in the next room, and she suggested we pick some wild berries for our supper. In one of the pails we discovered a package of Ploughboy tobacco and an old corncob pipe that uncle had carved and often smoked with obvious pleasure. Ploughboy had been Uncle John's favorite brand.

Many years ago an acre or two of land had been cleared in the maple forest, about two-hundred yards west of the farmhouse. The rich soil produced an abundance of table vegetables, potatoes and sweetcorn.

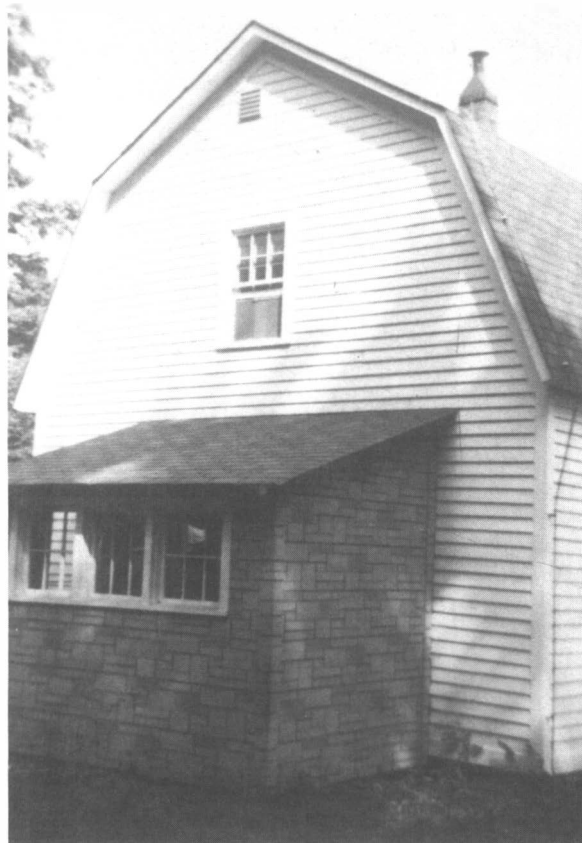
Strawberries and raspberries grew wild in the hidden oasis and thrived in the sandy loam. Uncle had also set out some cultivated strawberry plants at one time and they eventually intermingled with the wild. They bore fruit several times larger than the small, but very sweet, wild berries. Red raspberries were also plentiful in season and when spread over freshly-baked shortcake provided an unrivaled treat.

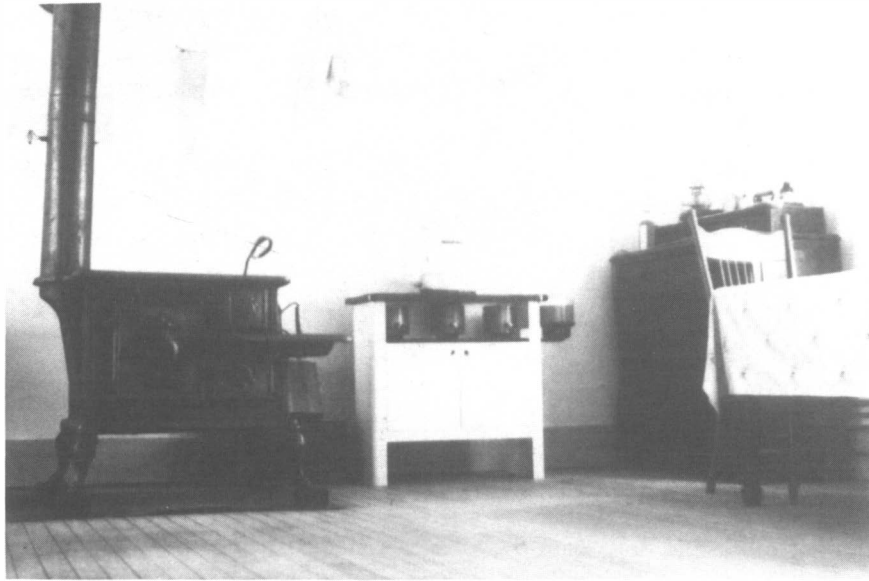
I first went berry picking with my mother and older sister when I was about four years old. The small, fragile berries accumulated so slowly in my pail, that to keep up with the others, I filled it half-full of sand and spread the raspberries across the top. By the time we left, my pail appeared to be almost full. The praise

I got for being so industrious changed to outrage, when my mother turned the sandy berries out to wash them at the well. She managed to salvage some and I was able to savor my first wild-raspberry shortcake, even though an occasional grain of sand between my teeth reminded me of my misdeed. Now, some forty years later, we were still able to pick enough wild strawberries in this secluded hollow, to add a bit of sparkle to our evening meal.

At age eighty-three my mother was unable to take long hikes on the sandy trails she trod as a girl. Nevertheless, no island trip was ever concluded until we roamed together through the old orchard and paid our respects at her father's grave. His orchard was a proud achievement

New stormhouse and chimney canopy





Kitchen cookstoves

and he had asked to be buried there among his prized fruit-trees. We sometimes pulled a few weeds or chopped down saplings that intruded inside the little picket fence protecting his resting place. A prayer and a bouquet of wildflowers that were placed near the gravestone ended the visit.

Our routine was similar at the little island cemetery where Uncle John was buried, along with other relatives and old friends. As we moved among the gravestones, I came to know more about many of the pioneers, whose names and exploits were familiar to me since my childhood.

Trying to escape an oppressive regime, stifling poverty and a hopeless future, these early immigrants were drawn to this land of opportunity, with little more than an overpowering urge to make a better life for themselves and their families. They built their own houses, made their own clothes, cleared and tilled the land that produced the food for themselves and their livestock. Forced to rely on their own ingenuity and resourcefulness, they

became almost completely self-sustaining.

I listened as my mother repeated anecdotes I had heard a hundred times, but came to life and took on new meaning here, in what had been her own little world. I pondered her words as I watched the last, living member of this pioneer family, gently touch each stone, yearning to bring back the joyous times of her youth, if only for just a few fleeting moments.

As we followed the winding trail through the maple forest back to the farmhouse, I asked if she would like to visit a former schoolchum, who had been her best friend when they attended the island's one-room schoolhouse. Her friend, Maggie, in poor health, seldom made the boatrip to the island anymore; this would be their last opportunity to see one another.

The next day we climbed in the Jeep and headed for the settlement where Maggie was staying with her daughter. Driving an early model Jeep was somewhat like riding a horse; by leaning forward as we bumped along the sand and gravel

road, the shaking motion was lessened considerably. We stopped for awhile at the old schoolhouse, where Maggie and my mother learned the three R's in the last century. Once alive with chattering youngsters, it was now deserted and forlorn-looking--just a part of history.

The little, one-room schoolhouse had watched as the island became a lumbering station for the busy steamships plying the Great Lakes. Later, it witnessed the formation of farms, whose produce and livestock were shipped cheaply to far-off cities on the same boats that stopped for a load of firewood. When coal replaced wood as fuel, the steamships no longer found it profitable to dock at the island. Faced with the double shipping costs of both water and long-distance rail or truck hauling, the islanders abandoned their farms, one-by-one, and moved to the mainland.

Maggie, and a few others, were among the handful of oldtimers who still returned to the island for a mid-summer's visit. Her daughter greeted us warmly at the door of the little cottage and motioned us into the parlor. The years had not been kind to Maggie, who struggled to restrain the telltale tremors of palsy. The old friends embraced and the intervening years were bridged for awhile with joyful childhood recollections. Smiles and happy thoughts served to temporarily diminish the pain of growing old. Our visit made us realize how fortunate we were that our mother had been spared a tragic disability and was blessed with relatively good health. Looking back, I try to forget the tears that were shed and just remember their chuckles and twinkling eyes, as they

briefly relived the distant past.

Michigan enjoys a long summer twilight in this latitude and it was our favorite time of day. Each evening we enjoyed sitting on the squared-off log that uncle had thoughtfully placed near the farmhouse, at least thirty years ago. A family of bats we could hear squeaking between the boards on the summerhouse, emerged to satisfy their voracious appetite for insects. In spite of tales about bats becoming entangled in one's hair, none ever came that close as they darted about in flight, silhouetted against the fading light.

In the quiet and peace of evening, sounds carry for a great distance on the pure, island air. We could hear nesting seagulls protesting on Gull Point, as a fox stole some eggs for an evening meal; an occasional tinkling cowbell, and sometimes, the muffled sound of breakers pounding on the beach. Gathering darkness and a cool breeze out of the forest, were gentle reminders that another day was drawing to a close. Moving inside the farmhouse, we sat for awhile in the kitchen, lighted by a flickering kerosene lamp.

Our mother seemed to be lost in thought, then, startled us by saying: "You know, I'd really like to make a trip to the island someday." Her forgetfulness had been apparent for sometime, but this episode was the first indication that her fading memory would soon lag far behind her physical well-being. She accepted our reassurance that she was, indeed, on the island, where she was born and spent her youth. It proved to be her final visit to the scene of her childhood.

Chapter XV

The *Morazan* Shipwreck

Closing Reflections

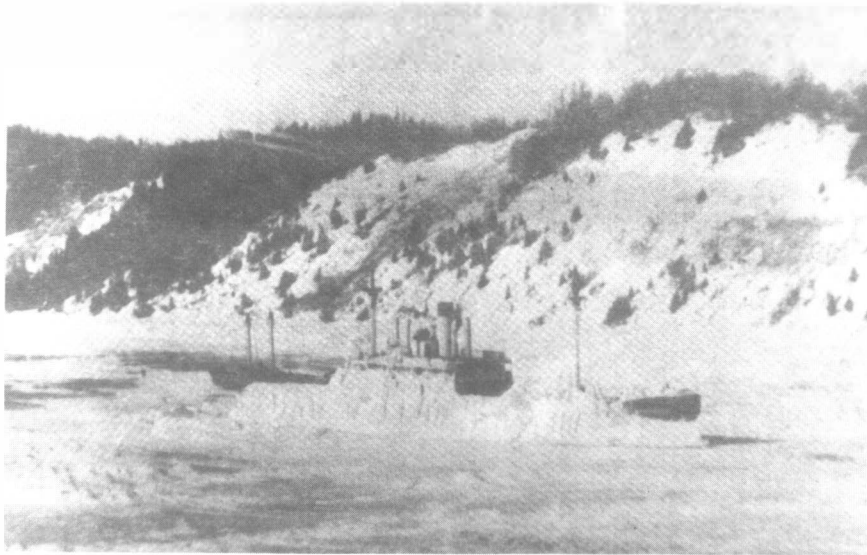
The huge sand dunes, dotted with pine and juniper, serving as a background for a wrecked steamship that appeared on my television set, had a familiar look. On the night of November 29, 1960, an ocean-going freighter, the *Francisco Morazan*, bound for the Netherlands, was caught in a dreaded wintry blizzard on Lake Michigan. On that fateful day, a witches brew of frigid air, combining with the large body of relatively warm water, formed a violent snowstorm that overtook the *Morazan* racing toward the St. Lawrence seaway, scheduled to close in a day or so. Miles off course, according to news reports, the ill-fated vessel was driven onto the rocky shoals lining the southern shore of South Manitou Island.

I had jogged along that beach and climbed those dunes just a few months earlier, so the scene was unmistakably familiar, but I never dreamed I would see it on a television news program. I had also cruised nearby in my fourteen-foot runabout, and quite by accident, passed over some timbers still visible from an earlier wreck. During the last century the Manitou area was a graveyard for many ships. If there is any truth to stories that persist, of early adventurers lighting fires on the beach to lure unsuspecting ships to

their destruction, this remote southwest shore of the island would have been a likely spot to carry out such a treacherous deed.

The one-hundred-foot-tall South Manitou lighthouse, erected in 1871, with a powerful steady beam, had been deactivated only two years previously, so the young captain, confident with his initial command and navigating blindly in a snowstorm, had no hint of impending disaster. Huge waves repeatedly raised and then dashed the two-thousand-ton freighter onto the rocks, smashing holes in the ship's bottom, allowing water to surge into the hold faster than it could be pumped out. Mountainous waves gradually drove the ship closer to shore, where it became marooned on the rocks, in about nine feet of water.

The coastguard cutter, *Mackinaw*, drawing about fourteen feet, was one of the rescue vessels standing by, unable to immediately aid the stricken freighter because of high seas and shallow water. As the storm subsided on December 1, a surfboat from the cutter managed to transport the *Morazan* captain's pregnant wife to the *Mackinaw*, where she was picked up by a helicopter and taken to Traverse City. Three days later the captain and his crew were also transferred by



*Francisco Morazan, locked in ice. Early 1960's
Leelanau Enterprise and Tribune photo*

surfboat to the *Mackinaw* and turned over to immigration authorities for return to their homelands.

The disaster and dangerous rescue attempts that were front page news across the country, now gave way to less dramatic efforts to salvage the ship's nine-hundred-ton general cargo. Initial attempts had to be abandoned because the salvage barge and tugs could not maneuver close to the ship in the shallow water.

In the meantime, area newspapers reported that pirates and souvenir hunters in small power boats, had boarded the ship and were making off with the cargo; it became necessary for the insurance people to hire an island resident to drive them off. Eventually, the remaining seven-hundred tons of cargo was removed by local operators using shallow draft boats. In spite of threatened lawsuits and other efforts to force the removal of the *Morazan*, it was still there when I traveled to the island the following summer.

The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway had placed two new carferries into

service, and a trip across the lake from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Ludington, on the *SS Badger* or *SS Sparton* was an enjoyable experience. But it was occasionally marred by the appearance of surface debris on the lake. I remember as a child, calling my father's attention to a solitary board I saw floating near the ship, and asking how it could have traveled so far from shore. Now, it was no longer unusual to see trash on the surface, along with bulging garbage bags, apparently tossed over the side of a boat. Nevertheless, the water around the island remained crystal clear, and once in awhile, we drank it from our cupped hands when hiking near the shore on a hot day. None of us ever got a digestive upset from the lake or well-water during all of the years we visited the island.

Having previously cruised around the island several times in an outboard-powered runabout and encountering a number of dangerous areas, I made a rough chart of the shoreline outside of the harbor. In general, I found the lake to be

shallow on the north side--the sandy bottom strewn haphazardly with stones and rocks. The west side, lined with massive sand dunes sweeping upwards from the shore, hundreds of feet high, offer a formidable challenge to any would-be climber. Bleached golden sand and stony beaches blend into the emerald-tinted water, concealing huge boulders that were scattered at random by a gargantuan force during the last ice age. Some of the room-size monsters lie in wait just a few inches below the water's surface, ready to capsize a carelessly approaching boat. We felt unsafe cruising closer than two-hundred yards from shore, and when landing, threaded our way carefully toward the beach, with a lookout at the bow probing for the big ones near the surface.

Hidden near the island's southwest corner is the area known as "Valley of the Giants," with some of the largest trees in the country, including a spectacular white cedar that was probably just a seedling when Columbus discovered America. Rounding this stretch, the dunes gradually decrease in height to

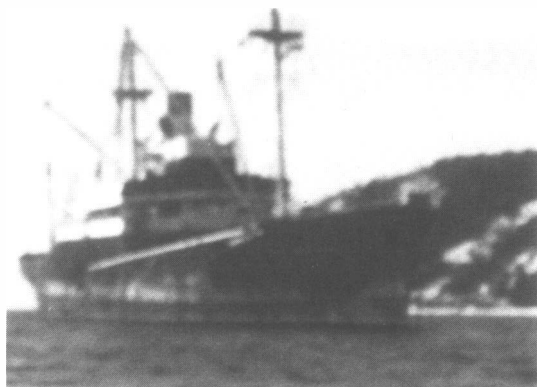
ground level near the lighthouse. Rocks and boulders littering the lake bottom along the southern shoals are smaller and there are fewer of them. With the boat drawing less than a foot of water, it was safe cruising much closer to shore.

Once inside the deep harbor, any fear of striking a submerged object vanished--one could see the sand and gravel bottom through fifteen or twenty feet of placid, clear water until it disappeared into depths of a hundred or more feet. We never ventured very far outside of the harbor's protective arms in our small boat, unless we determined that the lake was fairly calm and there was no storm on the horizon. By heading northeast from the old pier where we launched the boat, and passing around nearby Gull Point, we could tell quickly if it was safe to proceed any farther.

In the shallows, incredibly large schools of fresh water herring churned the water to silver, sparkling in the sun like exploding fireworks as they fanned out in all directions. The multitude of seagulls nesting there did not appreciate visitors and

Jeep and trailer with boat





Morazan on rocky shoal, 1961



View from the bow

showed their displeasure by taking to the air, flying in our direction and clamoring with such vigor, that it was impossible to carry on a conversation with someone a dozen feet away. It was pure bedlam and rather frightening to watch this show of force by hundreds of outraged parent birds; we learned to avoid them and their raucous screaming by giving their territory a wide berth.

On a pleasant July day, eight months after the *Francisco Morazan* was driven aground, a friend and I decided to take some closeup pictures of the stranded vessel. Leaving the harbor and rounding Sandy Point near the lighthouse, we soon had the rusty derelict in sight. Our picture-taking began as we slowly coasted around the *Morazan*, marveling at the power of the twenty-foot waves that had lifted this huge, two-hundred-forty-six-foot-long, two-thousand-ton ocean-going freighter and thrust it onto the rocky shoal.

We looked in vain for an open porthole or bulkhead to get a view inside, but without success. Our curiosity was aroused by an object hanging over the rail on the port side near the bow. It proved to be a worn Jacobs ladder in very poor shape. The rope was frayed and some of the

rungs were missing, however, it seemed to be anchored securely in place. After making our boat fast, my companion made his way gingerly up the side of the ship. I followed against my better judgment--the temptation to explore the ship was too strong to overcome.

We came upon a scene of utter devastation--trash of every description was underfoot. Pirates and souvenir hunters had made off with everything of value that wasn't welded in place. Bunks had been wrenched from their supports, chairs and other furniture stolen or demolished--even the cork insulation had been stripped from the walk-in freezer by someone in a frenzy to salvage the copper cooling coils. The lake between the ship and shore was still littered with some of the cork and other debris.

Wood from broken pallets and all manner of decomposing rubbish floated on the water in the completely flooded hold. Rust-covered winches, anchors and other equipment seemed to have been neglected for years. The ancient anchors were frozen with rust to the ship's sides. Cargo booms extended over the side of the ship where they had fallen, stripped of their ropes

and pulleys. The ship's wheel, compass, bell and other navigational equipment were all missing from the pilothouse, now in a state of complete disarray. A few scraps of pages torn from the ship's log that were strewn about, cast no light on the freighter's final hours. This once proud vessel, bearing the name of a dashing Central American patriot, had come to an ignominious end--only the battered hull survived.

After World War II, subtle changes affecting the island's future began to take place. Former permanent residents were leaving for the mainland where modern conveniences made life much easier. A few oldtimers returned during the summer months to maintain their island retreats, but some neglected their former homes that deteriorated badly. Bertha was one of the last inhabitants to remain on the island the year around. Her enthusiastic greeting as we landed at the dock served as an official welcome. Sometimes, we had the feeling that

this island hideaway would remain forever unchanged, as long as Bertha continued to roam among her usual haunts and was always there to greet us.

As the island's population dwindled, so did the number of patchwork cars in running condition. If no one showed up to provide us with a ride to the farm, we had to leave our supplies with Bertha and hike the three miles to pickup the Jeep. Noticing my frustration, she suggested I park it at her place and offered to let me erect a small garage on her property. It was very convenient to have the Jeep so close to the dock.

Bertha seldom accepted a ride in any of the island cars--she preferred to walk, regardless of the distance. She did, however, like the Jeep and readily climbed in for a lift whenever we met on the road. She persisted in roaming all over the island, although I noticed a perceptible slowdown as she neared her eighty-third birthday.

One day as I passed the cemetery

Author, William, inspecting pump, parlor-garage in background.





Floyd at the wheel

while driving her home, she asked me to stop and to follow her. Leading the way to the far side she came to a halt next to the grave of an unknown baby. There was no gravestone to mark the spot--only a rock with a few scratches on it. I was startled when Bertha suddenly told me that she wanted to be buried next to the baby. Try as I might, I could not learn its identity or why she had selected this site. There was a bemused look on her face as she changed the subject and offered only vague answers to unasked questions. I never did learn if there was actually a child buried there, or if she had found a way to lessen her grief over losing her own child in a tragic accident, now buried hundreds of miles away. Bertha was not at the dock to greet us the following year, and a very precious part of the island died along with her.

After more than a half-century of service, the South Manitou Coast Guard Station was closed in 1958, along with the 1871 lighthouse. The island was almost deserted except for the one remaining farmer

and occasional campers. It was not unusual to leave one's property and find everything in exactly the same condition a year later. At times, I cruised completely around the island without seeing a living soul. Pulling up onto the beach and noticing strange footprints made me feel a bit like Robinson Crusoe. I carelessly left my red boat-anchor in plain view on the beach one summer and it was still there the following year.

The Coast Guard had maintained order on the island; their presence alone discouraged any acts of potential vandalism. But with no police authority visible any longer, security became a problem. First, a broken window or two, then the theft of easily concealed outside items, and finally, breaking and entering. Although our farm was somewhat remote from the dock, the old bell that grandmother tolled to signal the men at mealtime, was the first item to disappear. Other farm tools were taken, and to top it off, a set of grandfather's heavy wagon-wheels that escaped the big barn fire, were

somehow rolled down to a private yacht, destined to serve as a decoration outside a suburban home. Strangely enough, people who would not think of stealing from their next-door neighbors had no qualms about helping themselves to whatever struck their fancy on the island. Before they could be taken, I rounded up the hand-formed wooden tools that grandfather had made in the previous century, and donated them to what is now known as the Leelanau Historical Museum.

There was only minor vandalism at the boarded-up, deserted coastguard station, and the lighthouse escaped damage for a few years. Then, one summer day, as I walked along the beach, I noticed an open door at the base. An intruder, bent on destruction, had forced it open in spite of a government "No Trespassing" sign. Windows were broken at random along the walkway to the house and throughout the living quarters. Broken glass, plaster and woodwork remnants littered the floor that my Aunt Lill had kept so clean when Uncle Jim was keeper of the light.

Returning to the tower, I climbed up the spiral staircase that uncle inspected daily, with his ever present whiskbroom and dustpan, on the lookout for a few grains of sand. Stepping onto the landing at the top I was overcome with a sickening feeling at what I saw. The large, kerosene lantern was gone and the valuable prism, that diffused the steady light across the lake for miles, had been wantonly smashed. The last time I had trudged up the stairs with Uncle Jim to watch him light the oillamp, there was not as much as a fingerprint on its highly-polished surface.

I made my way outside and stood for awhile on the catwalk high above the surf, drinking in the beauty of the crescent-shaped harbor, with its gleaming sandy beaches rimmed by evergreens. The lowering clouds formed a canopy over the multi-colored lake, with shades of emerald green near the shoreline, gradually blending into the deeper water blues. Seagulls, effortlessly riding the lake breeze, glided by over the breakers rolling onto the shore. Surrounded by nature's beauty, I wondered what kind of person was responsible for such senseless damage to the tower. As I slowly retraced my steps to the bottom, the friendly shadows I remembered as a child, took on a sinister look as though they, too, had played a part in the abomination.

A gentle rain started to fall, like tears being shed for this lonely sentinel, that since 1871, had withstood the onslaught of waves and storms beating against its hundred-foot-high flanks. The beacon that provided reassurance to mariners over the years, was now dimmed forever--a relic of the forgotten past: I remember your former glory and weep for you, defenseless against vandals.

For the first time, it became necessary to padlock our farm buildings. A mere lock would not deter someone intent on breaking in, but it helped to discourage the mildly curious. Security inside the darkened sheds appealed to the chipmunks and deermice that scampered among the shingles and firewood. It was easy to coax the tame chipmunks to nibble at a hand-held cracker, while a pair of comical-looking deermice, long ears erect, sat on their haunches baring snow-white undersides, and stared at me with their bulging

popeyes. More curious than fearful, I was probably the only human they ever saw. As long as they did not set up housekeeping in my pantry I let them live happily ever after.

The many songbirds were always a source of delight, and as they became accustomed to my presence, I was able to watch as well as listen to them sing. I often heard the distant call of a whip-poor-will, but was never able to watch this mysterious creature-of-the-night perform. Then, at daybreak shortly before my visit was to end, I was awakened by the song and a persistent drumming on a log near an open bedroom window. Each rapid-fire “whip-poor-will” call

was accompanied by a sharp tap on the log with its beak. I watched, fascinated, as it continued the whistle-like song with a measured beat, like a maestro tapping time on a podium. Then, as suddenly as it appeared, it vanished into the shadows.

As the years went by, the lack of farming and of livestock to retard rampant growth, allowed nature to reclaim the land. Open pastures became overgrown with sumac and juniper, some expanding to clumps of fifty feet or more. Creeping juniper thrived close to the ground in the sandy soil. Old wagon trails I used to follow easily through the forest to the

*North Manitou Island in distance, from
South Manitou's west-side bluff*



massive dunes west of the farm, or the snaking cattle trail through the north forty that sloped to the water's edge, became obscured by underbrush and maple saplings. I dared not wander through the cool green forest anymore without a pocket compass, lest I strayed from a trail that often disappeared into a tangled mass of light and shade. No longer could I call out to an uncle, hoping for guidance, or listen for the creak of wagon wheels, or the hoofbeat of horses, to give me a directional clue. Only the century-old maple trees whispering their secrets broke the ghostly silence.

I pondered on the whim of fate that led my grandfather to chose for his home, this tiny speck on a map of the boundless New World. He came to an unknown land, not looking for gold or precious stones, only the freedom to work for a better life for himself and his family. He broke the ground with the help of a yoke of oxen, struggled with fickle nature, fought plagues of insects, and built a second farmhouse after losing the first one to a fire. But he conquered the wilderness and transformed his dream into reality. The battle finally won, a 320-acre farm established, and having become almost completely self-sustaining, my grandparents must have thought they had sampled paradise.

It was late in the day when I left the forest and picked my way through the fragrant junipers that dot the massive dunes on the sunset side of the island. The breathtaking view from the summit unveiled a seemingly limitless expanse of sky and water--the great, broad, inland sea that carried the early voyageurs through the vast wilderness centuries ago. Sometimes unforgiving, but calm

today, the restless surf rolled gently onto the lonely shore completely devoid of humanity.

In the twilight, as Mother Nature donned her evening gown, the setting sun flashed a million golden sequins on the rippling water. A pair of bald eagles appeared, riding the thermals. Suddenly, one became a blur as it dove to the water and emerged from the spray clutching a fish in its talons. The primal scene awakened a feeling that I had been permitted a glimpse of the distant past, before the coming of the white man. In my fantasy I saw a solitary Indian Chief in his feathered headdress, silhouetted against the sky, standing erect on the crest, surveying his domain. His gaze followed the pair of thunderbirds skyward as he paid homage to the benevolent Manitou. He voiced his gratitude for nature's bounty and petitioned the Great Spirit for guidance and wisdom to safeguard the land for his people and all who would follow.

The magic spell lingered as the crimson sun, in a final blaze of glory, sank slowly below the horizon, bathing the sky and water with sunset's purple glow. Alone in this magnificent solitude, I also prayed that man would learn to live in harmony with nature and to shield our priceless heritage from covetous eyes. I left this enchanting legacy from the past with a wish that its frail beauty and allure be protected and preserved, to endure forever.

*“Sweet vision do not fade away
Linger, until my heart
shall take into itself
this summer day”*

--Longfellow



The "Crib"--a shoal warning-light near the Manitou Passage



Pink wild roses

(Right) *Outline of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Leelanau and Benzie Counties, established by an act of Congress on October 21, 1970. North and South Manitou Islands were later designated as Wilderness Areas--to forever retain their pristine and unspoiled character.*

Map--Courtesy National Park Service



Harbor shoreline, view from atop lighthouse



0 1 3 Kilometers
0 1 3 Miles



Several pieces of private property exist within the park's authorized boundary. Many small areas are not shown on the map. Respect all property owners' rights.

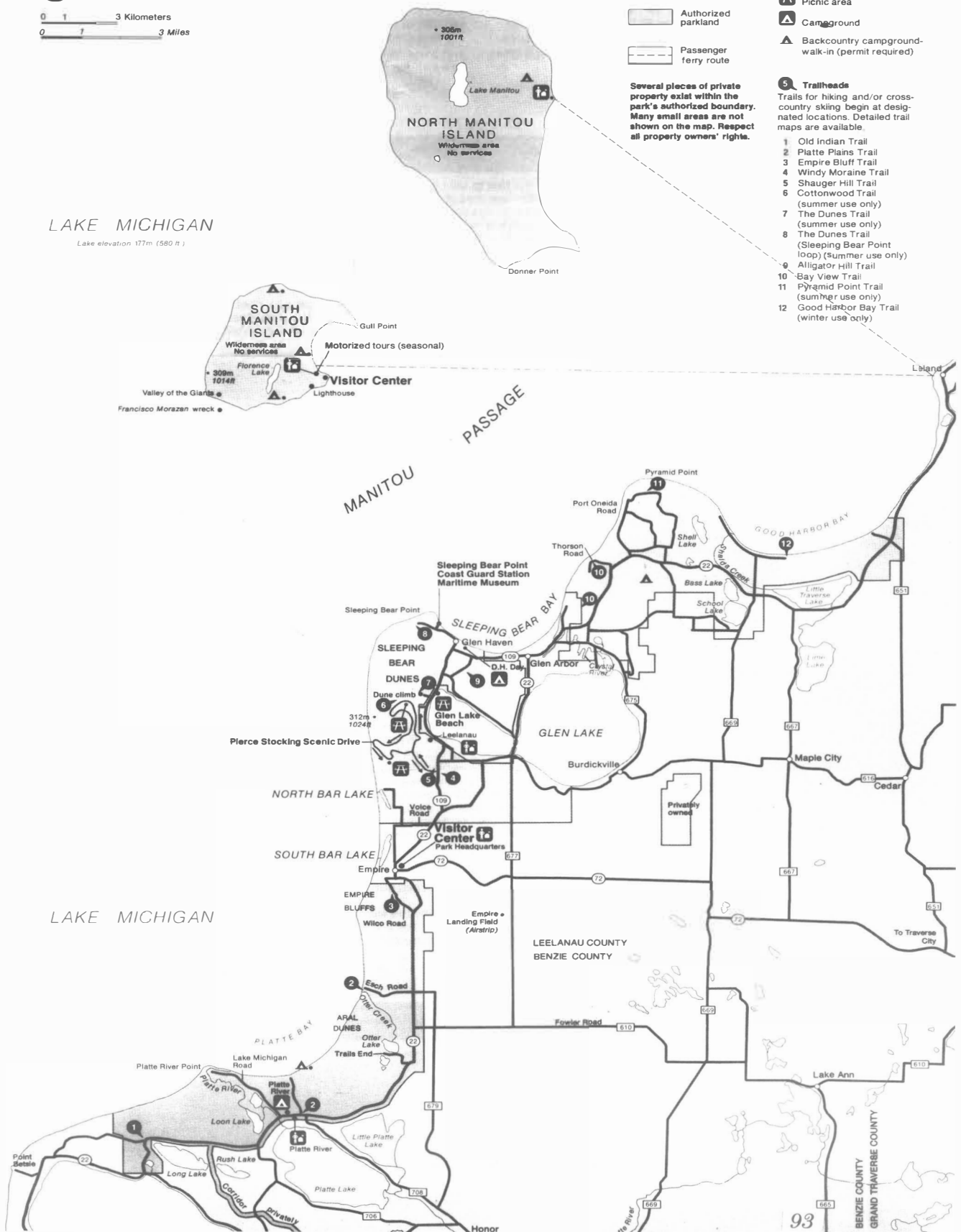


5 Trailheads
Trails for hiking and/or cross-country skiing begin at designated locations. Detailed trail maps are available.

- 1 Old Indian Trail
- 2 Platte Plains Trail
- 3 Empire Bluff Trail
- 4 Windy Moraine Trail
- 5 Shauger Hill Trail
- 6 Cottonwood Trail (summer use only)
- 7 The Dunes Trail (summer use only)
- 8 The Dunes Trail (Sleeping Bear Point loop) (summer use only)
- 9 Alligator Hill Trail
- 10 Bay View Trail
- 11 Pyramid Point Trail (summer use only)
- 12 Good Harbor Bay Trail (winter use only)

LAKE MICHIGAN

Lake elevation 177m (580 ft)



LAKE MICHIGAN

